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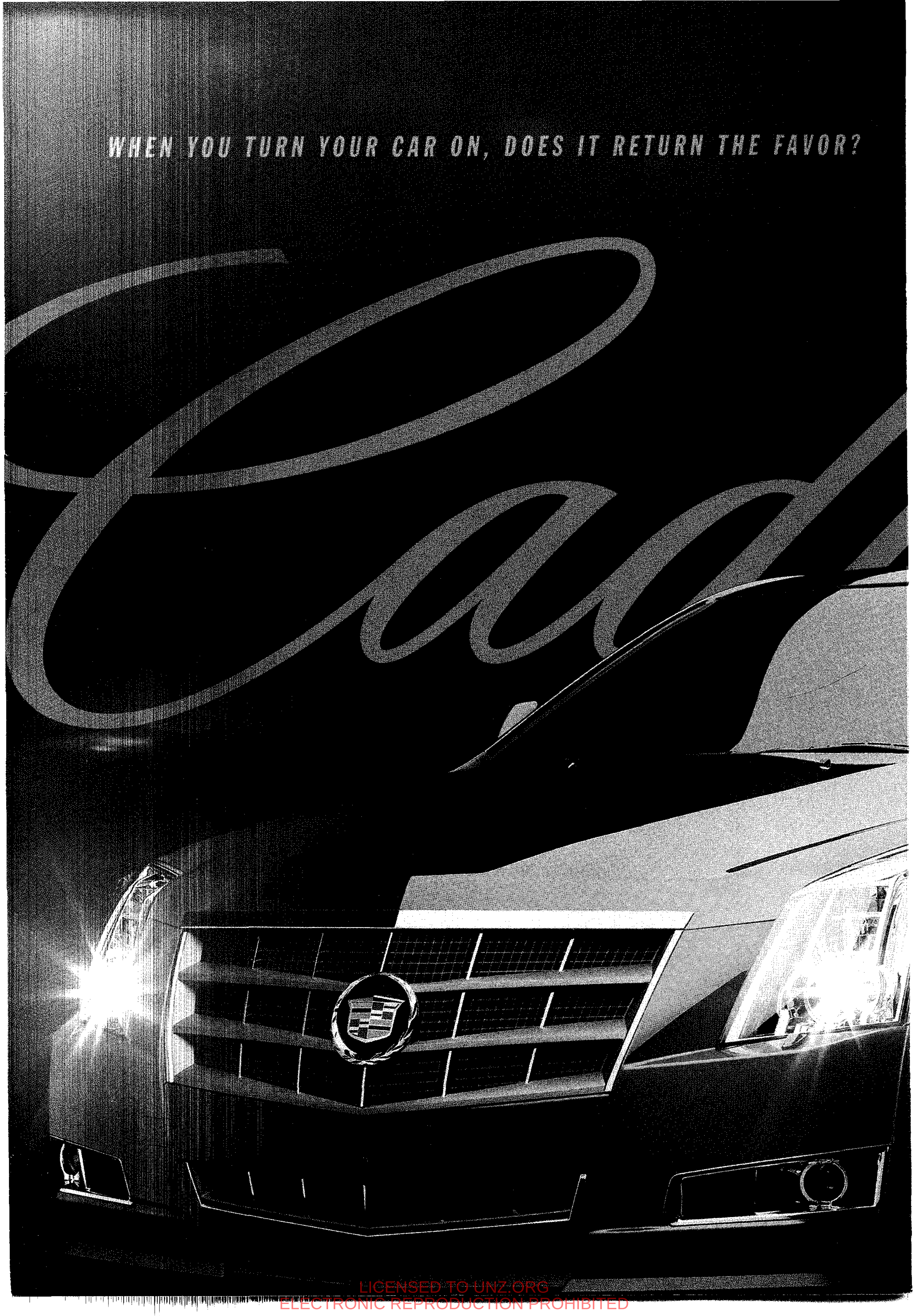
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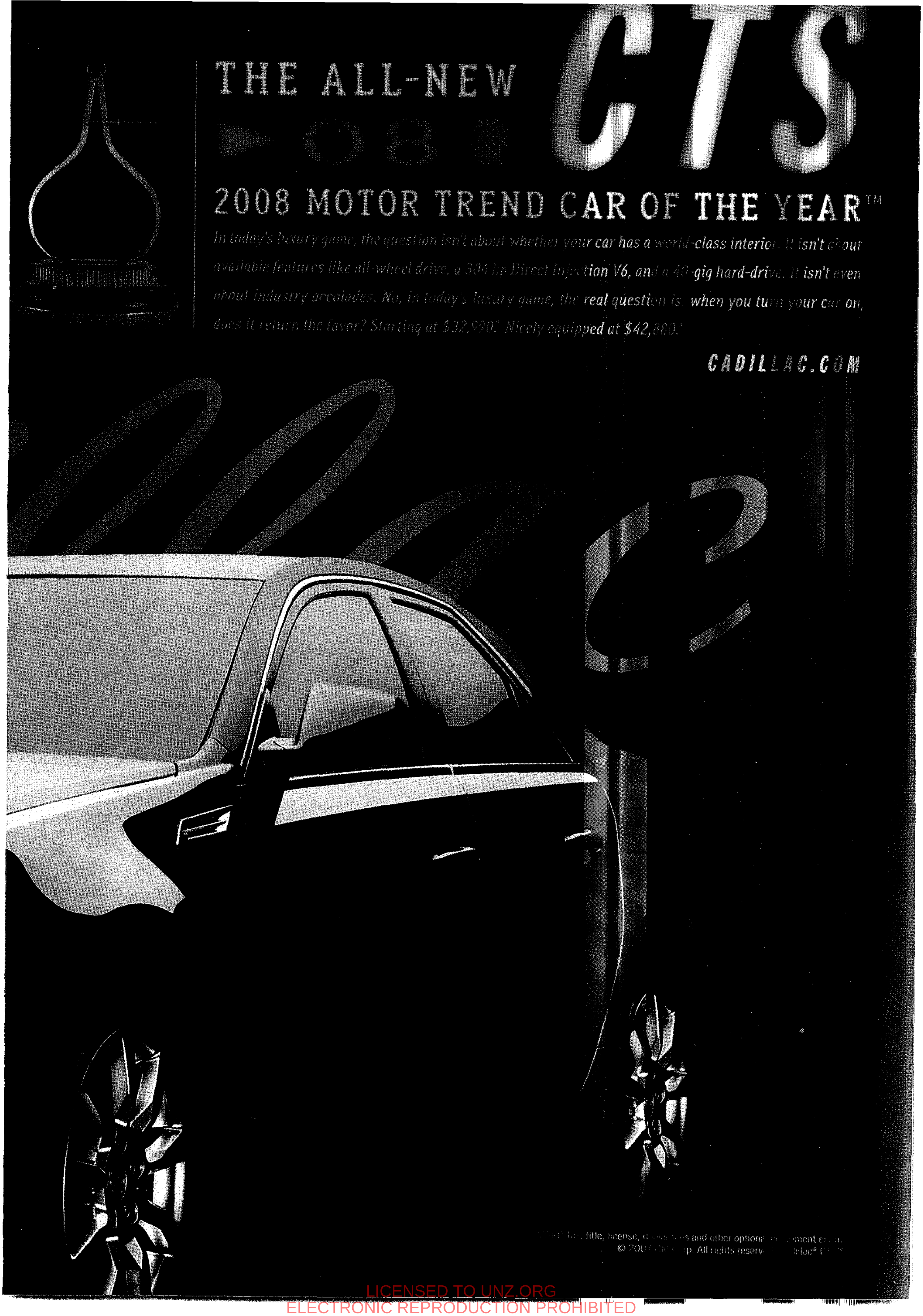

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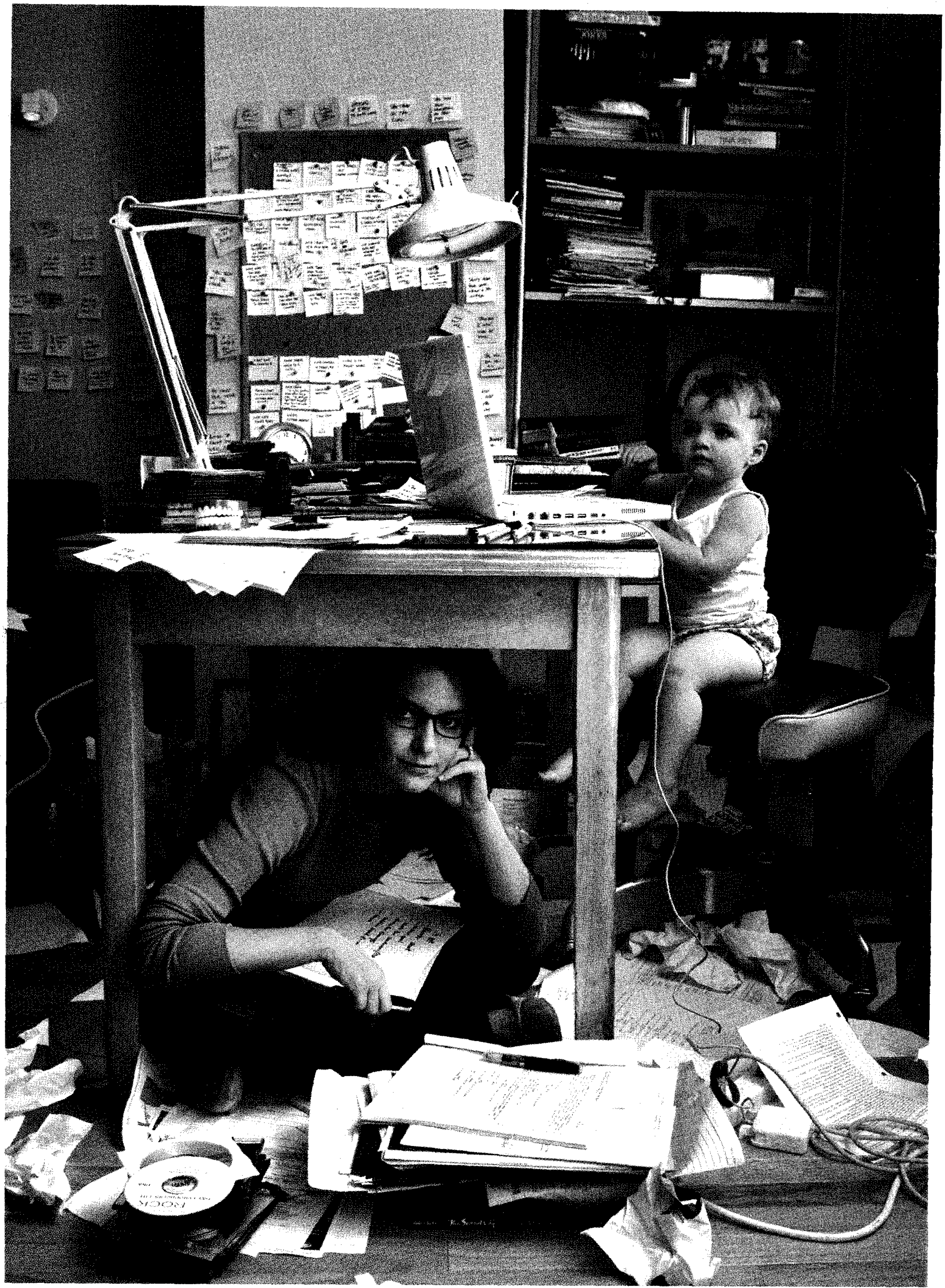

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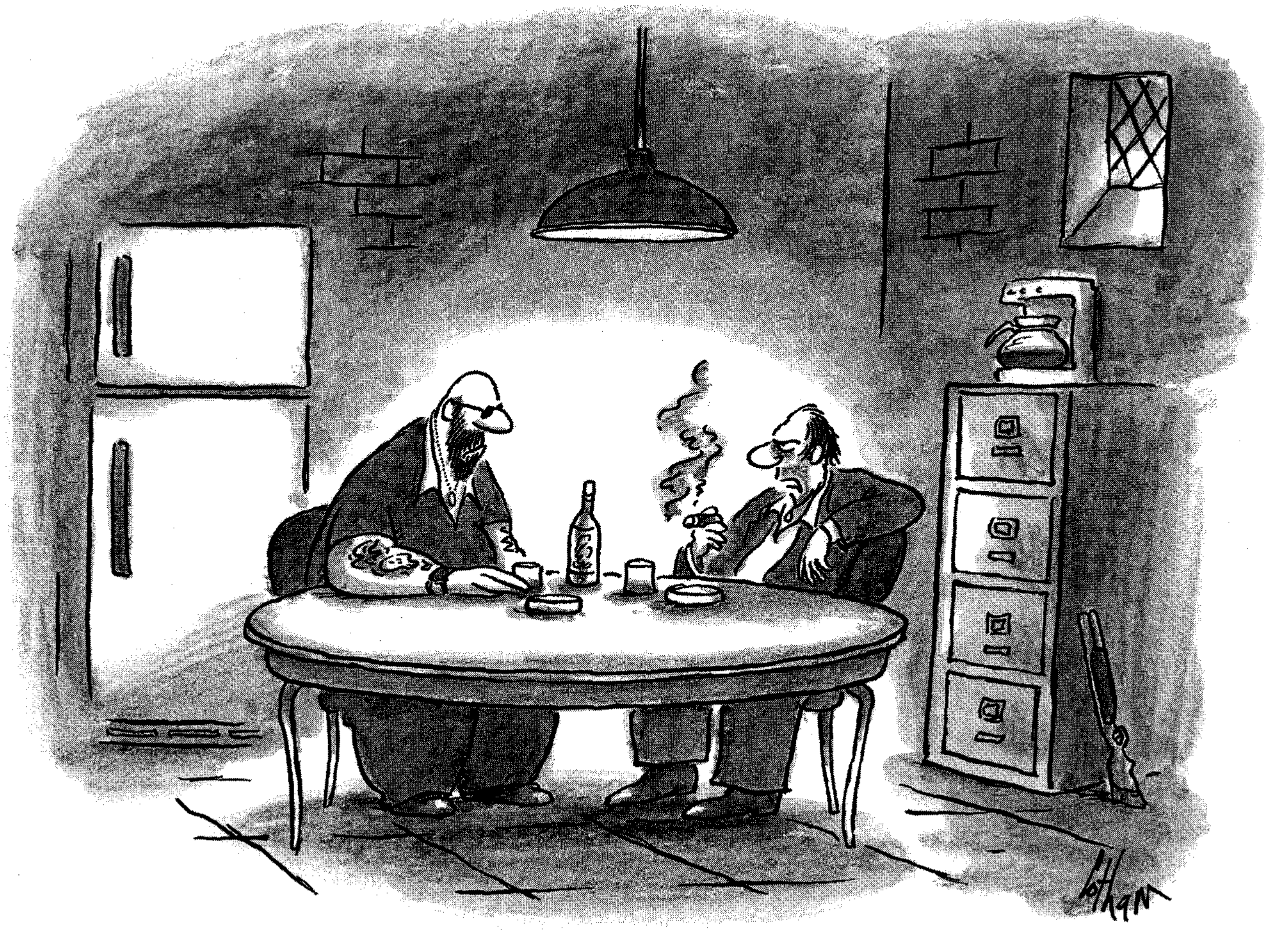
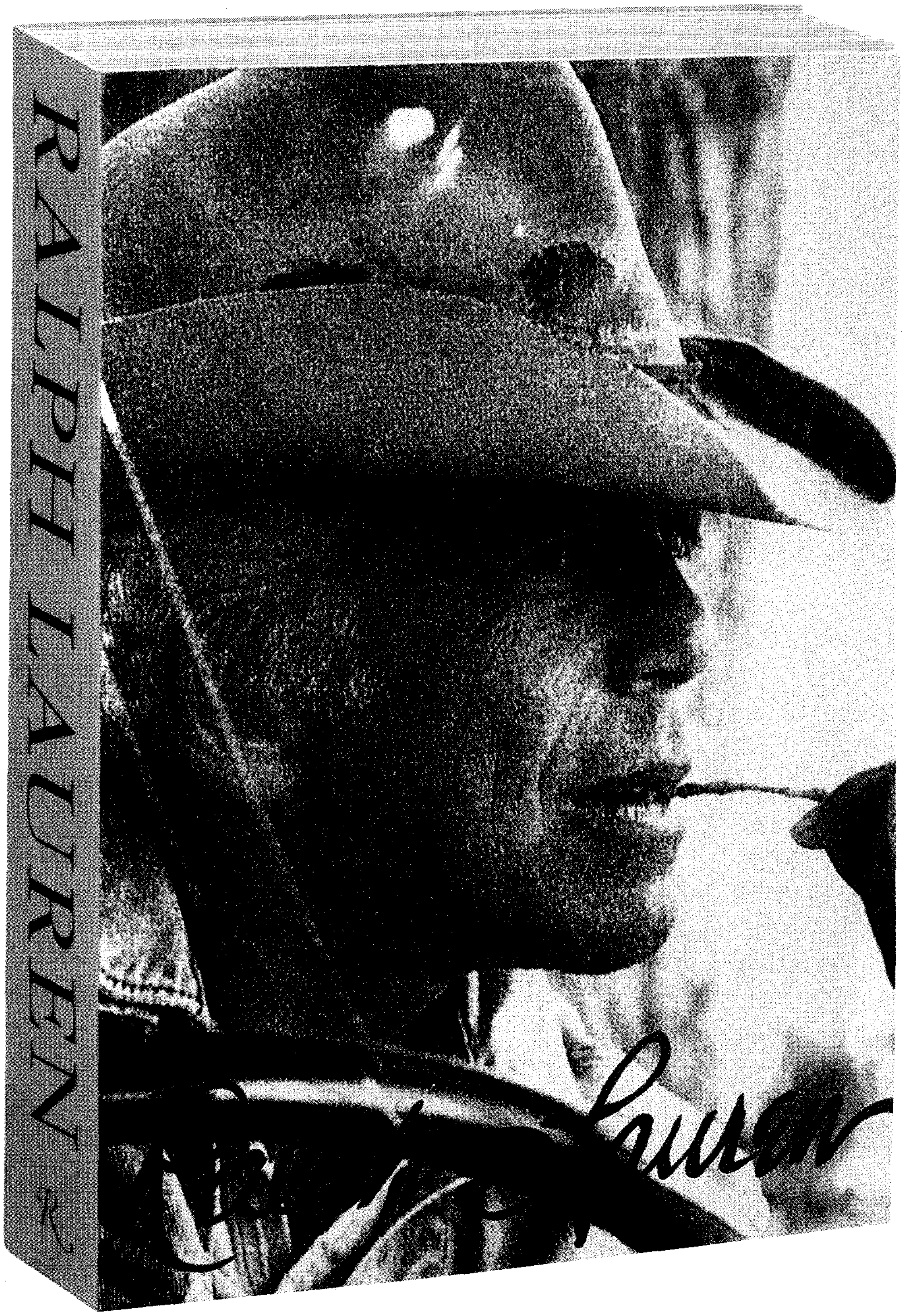
SPOTS *Joost Swarte*



"A guy gets his legs broken, he should have the right to choose his own doctor."

THE DEFINITIVE VOLUME ON THE WORK OF
RALPH LAUREN



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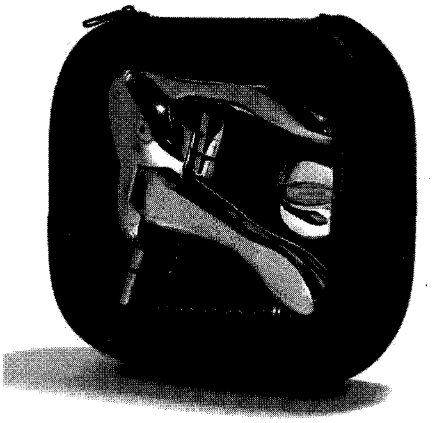

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ryan Lizza ("Return of the Nativist," p. 46) is the Washington correspondent for the magazine.

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 37) is the president of the New America Foundation. His book "Ghost Wars," about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan, is available in paperback.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 44) writes a regular column on economics, business, and finance.

D. T. Max ("Day of the Dead," p. 76) is the author of "The Family That Couldn't Sleep," a scientific and cultural history of prion disease, which came out in paperback this fall.

David Sedaris ("Journey Into Night," p. 52) has published several books of essays, including "Me Talk Pretty One Day" and "Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim."

Paul Slansky (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 60) is the author of "Idiots, Hypocrites, Demagogues, and More Idiots," which will be published in January.

Henri Cole (Poem, p. 84) teaches at Ohio State University. His sixth book, "Blackbird and Wolf," comes out in paperback in March.

Hugh Eakin ("Treasure Hunt," p. 62) is a senior editor at *The New York Review of Books*.

Frank Bidart (Poem, p. 66) won the 2007 Bollingen Prize in American Poetry. A new collection of his poetry, "Watching the Spring Festival," will be published in April.

Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 42) is a staff writer.

Jonathan Lethem (Fiction, p. 86) is the author of seven novels, including "You Don't Love Me Yet."

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 104) has a collection of art criticism, entitled "Let's See," coming out in May.

Malcolm Gladwell (Books, p. 92), a staff writer, has published two books, "The Tipping Point" and "Blink."

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 106) has been a film critic at the magazine since 1998. He is the author of "Great Books" and "American Sucker."

Bob Staake (Cover) has been contributing to *The New Yorker* since 2006. His children's book "This Is NOT a Pumpkin" came out in August.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ryan Lizza talks with *Dorothy Wickenden* on the weekly Campaign Trail podcast. / *Malcolm Gladwell* explains what's wrong with I.Q. fundamentalism on The New Yorker Out Loud. / The début of Et Als, by *Hilton Als*, plus blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, *Dana Goodyear*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / Paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder. / From the archives: *Seymour M. Hersh* on the U.S. and Iran, *James Surowiecki* on immigration, and thousands of book and film reviews. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events around the country.

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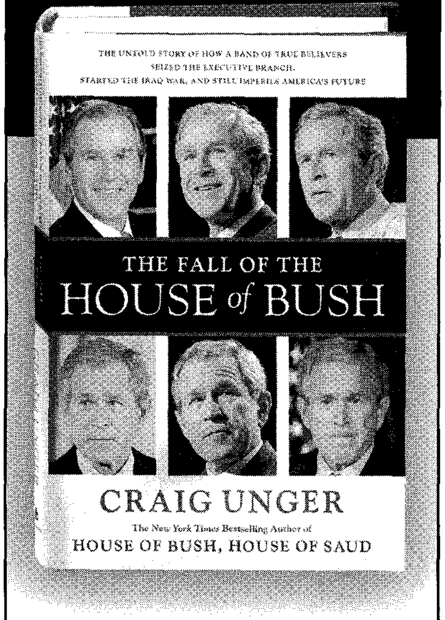
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ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

Elizabeth Kolbert argues that, in view of the atrocious average gas mileage of current cars, the present rate of global oil consumption, and the anticipated exponential growth in Indian and Chinese car ownership, the very existence of the automobile is imperilled (Books, November 5th). Only the invention of a "super car" that runs on a "safe, inexpensive, and . . . inexhaustible" power source would save it from extinction. But we already have a "super car": the bicycle, whose fuel source is indeed safe, inexpensive (free), and inexhaustible. Considering that forty per cent of this country's oil use comes from passenger cars, and that cars account for eighty-two per cent of trips of five miles or less—a distance easily travelled by bike—it is clear that the bicycle can do more for our health and fuel security than any concept car developed by G.M., Chrysler, or Ford. Our real job is not to pursue the ever-elusive technology that will allow our car addiction to continue but to transform our cities from sprawling suburban jungles into compact, human-sized neighborhoods where bicycling can flourish.

Andra Brosy
Portland, Ore.

Elizabeth Kolbert, in her excellent piece on the enormous efforts of big oil to develop unconventional energy resources with carbon footprints dwarfing even those of standard fossil fuels, makes it easy to appreciate why the board of directors of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* voted earlier this year to add climate change to the threat of nuclear weapons as a reason to move the hands of their Doomsday Clock closer to midnight ("Unconventional Crude," November 12th). Strange to say, we don't actually lack for suitable alternatives. A carbon tax, coupled with large-scale energy conservation and wind, solar, and environmentally sound, non-food-derived biofuel programs, would go a long way toward solving the problem. What seems to be in conspicuous short supply throughout our global village, however, is rational energy policies and the requisite political leadership to enact them.

Thomas Sullivan
Vineyard Haven, Mass.

NO JOKE

Tom Reiss's harrowing account of the French "comedian" Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala illustrates a particularly instructive contradiction in contemporary anti-Semitism ("Laugh Riots," November 19th). Marching arm in arm with the wife of Jean-Marie Le Pen on behalf of the racial purity of Cameroonian Pygmies, Dieudonné excoriates Jews for their fanaticism, tribalism, and exclusivity. Yet the public figures such as Bernard-Henri Lévy and Alain Finkielkraut whom he ridicules are among the most vocal advocates of a specifically French commitment to independence, democracy, and liberal humanism; the "Orthodox" neighborhood where Tribu Ka staged its May, 2006, rally protesting what it perceived as Jewish power, is in a district, the Marais, that is every bit as pluralistic (and gentrified) as Manhattan's Upper West Side. In the name of "anti-racism," therefore, Dieudonné and his allies demean the most conspicuous advocates, and beneficiaries, of a multicultural, progressive, and democratic civic culture. This is a fact that his "hip middle-class white" audience, as Reiss describes it, would be wise to consider, for his continued popularity carries implications not only for France but also for the moral claims of contemporary liberalism in general.

Marc Caplan
Professor of Yiddish Language,
Literature, and Culture
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Md.

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Volunteers of America Sidewalk Santas. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
16	17	18	12	13	14	15

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
HOLIDAY CHEER

The dynamic duo of Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman perform a one-night-only show at Carnegie Hall, "Kiki & Herb: The Second Coming—A Christmas Concert." They will send up tunes by Kanye West, Nina Simone, and Emmylou Harris. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
NO SMALL THING

The clever, subversive, and inclusive saxophone-heavy Microscopic Septet reigned supreme on the downtown jazz scene in the late eighties, before breaking up, in 1992. Last year, the group briefly reunited for the rerelease of its back catalogue; this week it's playing its singular amalgam of old-school swing and avant experimentation for one night only, at Sweet Rhythm. (See page 18.)

ART
FREUDIAN TIP

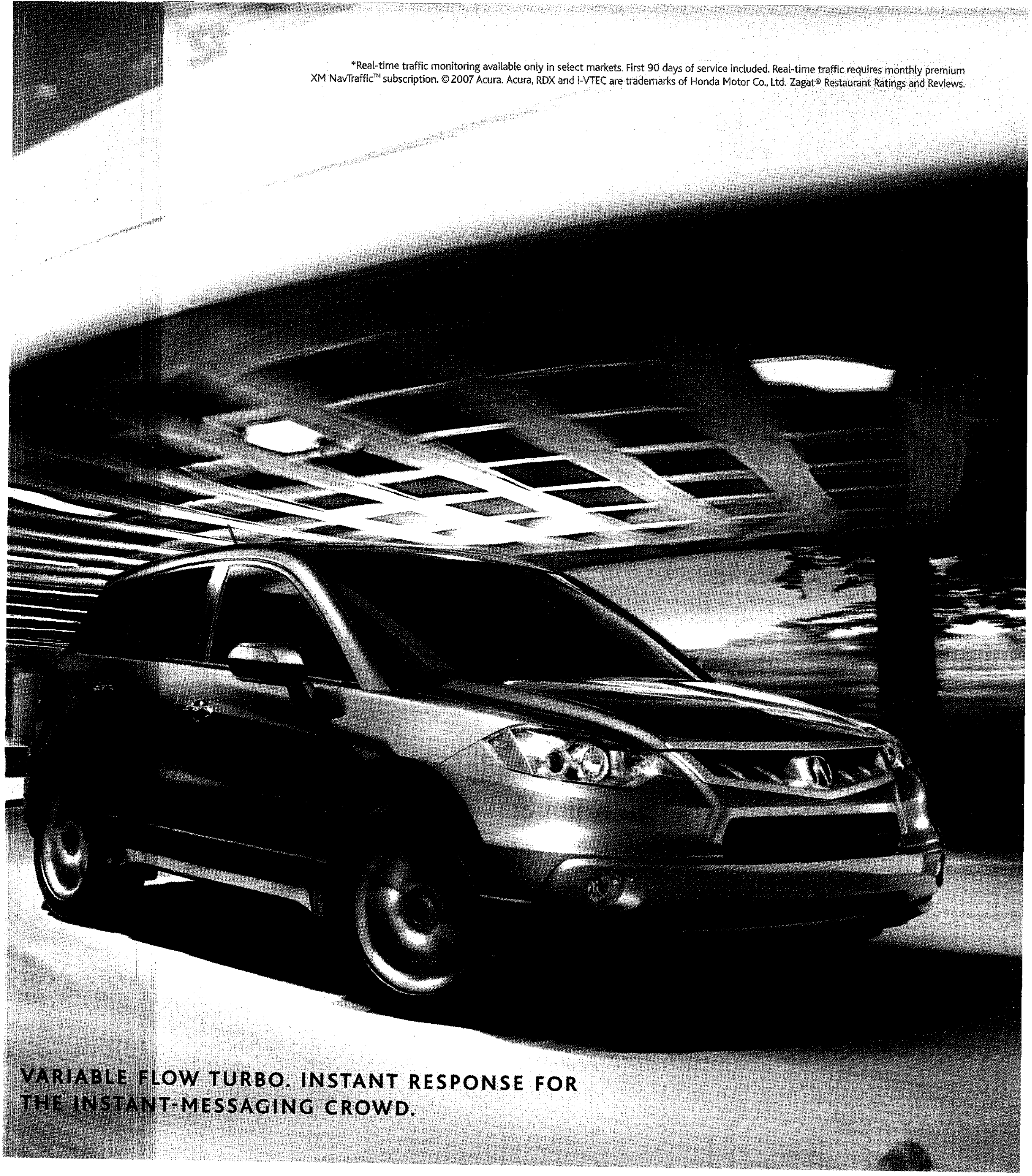
The British artist Lucian Freud is best known for painting searing portraits. His unorthodox approach to printmaking follows suit: he sets his etching plate on an easel and works directly from life. The exhibition "Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings," at MOMA, pairs approximately seventy etchings with twenty-seven related canvases and drawings. (See page 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LARGE BARGE

Brooklyn's Bargemusic has become a locus for exciting and unpredictable programming. This week features an evening with the beloved composer-pianist Fred Hersch and two concerts by the intrepid Zukofsky Quartet (performing string quartets by Verdi and Babbitt). (See page 27.)

MOVIES
THE CHILLS

The producer Val Lewton became a prolific pulp novelist in the nineteen-twenties and the head of his own horror-film unit during wartime. Crafting literate thrillers on low budgets, he recruited such talented directors as Jacques Tourneur and Mark Robson. Walter Reade offers Kent Jones's new documentary about Lewton, together with the classic "I Walked with a Zombie." (See page 32.)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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BIG BAD WOLF

Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" (1936), about a brave boy who captures a wolf, is an excellent teaching tool. Each of the characters has his or her own instrument and theme—Peter is strings, and jaunty; the wolf is horns, grand and angry—so that children can learn about the parts of the orchestra. The piece is also subtle. As the plot thickens, so does the music: monophony becomes polyphony. This week, the Guggenheim's "Works & Process" series will present "Peter and the Wolf" with George Manahan, New York City Opera's music director, conducting the Juilliard Ensemble. As for the narrator, this job has been a favorite of celebrities: John Gielgud, Boris Karloff, David Bowie, Tom Seaver. The Guggenheim's diseur will be Isaac Mizrahi. I asked Mizrahi what he thought of Peter's convincing the hunters not to shoot the wolf but to take him to a zoo. Didn't that seem a little mild for a piece composed at the height of Stalin's Terror? No, he replied. "The zoo is hard enough—the gulag, darling."

—*Joan Acocella*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BECKETT SHORTS
New York Theatre Workshop presents four one-act plays by Samuel Beckett: "Act Without Words" I and II, "Eh Joe," and "Rough for Theatre I." Mikhail Baryshnikov stars; Philip Glass provides original music. In previews. Opens Dec. 18. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

CUT TO THE CHASE
The vaudeville troupe Parallel Exit puts on a comedy show that incorporates magic, music, tap, and slapstick. Opens Dec. 12. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE
George Bernard Shaw's 1897 melodrama is set in the U.S. during the Revolutionary War. In previews. Opens Dec. 13. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

EDWARD THE SECOND
Red Bull Theatre presents Garland Wright's adaptation of the play by Christopher Marlowe, about a profligate young king. In previews. Opens Dec. 15. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE HOMECOMING
Raúl Esparza, Ian McShane, Eve Best, and Michael McKean star in Harold Pinter's Tony-winning play from 1967, about a dysfunctional North London family. Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 16. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

KIKI & HERB: THE SECOND COMING—A CHRISTMAS CONCERT
The battered old broad Kiki (Justin Bond) and her indefatigable accompanist, Herb (Kenny Mellman), spread some holiday cheer in a special appearance at Carnegie Hall. Dec. 12. (154 W. 57th St. 212-247-7800.)

THE LITTLE MERMAID
Francesca Zambello directs an adaptation of the film, with a book by Doug Wright and music and lyrics by Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, and Glenn Slater. In previews. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.)

NOW PLAYING

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY
This Steppenwolf transfer by Tracy Letts ("Bug") is about the disappearance of an Oklahoma family man. (Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

BLACK NATIVITY
As is tradition, Alfred Preisser's high-spirited revival of Langston Hughes's 1961 gospel theatre work plays fast and loose with the original. Nominally, Preisser's new setting is 42nd Street in 1973, on a block rife with dealers, prostitutes, and triple-X marquees. But once the action moves inside, it's pure Technicolor gospel fantasy, replete with a sparkly red curtain, a cast of dozens, and a groovy four-piece band. The divertissements are presided over by a deliciously over-the-top narrator (André De Shields, in a bright-red suit), who prances and preaches to everything from funk to Motown to "Silent Night." Along the way, Mary and Joseph get turned away, the baby Jesus arrives (in jaw-dropping fashion), and moments of unexpected and affecting stillness occur, like the moonlit apparition of the Shangilia Youth Choir of Kenya, dressed in snow-white party outfits and holding hands. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

CYMBELINE
Shakespeare's 1610 romance exudes the glow of the elegiac. The production and lighting designers draw out the fabulous in the story and lend to the production a charisma that the ensemble, for the most part, fails to deliver. Cymbeline (John Cullum), who banishes Posthumus (Michael Cerveris) and treats his daughter cavalierly, lacks the essential ingredient for tragedy: an inner life. The play is a series of surface excitements, chock-full of piquant barbarity: rape, kidnapping, poisoning, beheading. The handwringing and the heartbreak here turn out to have been unwarranted. By the end of the evening, both the characters and the audience have known many sorrows, most of which, it seems, never happened at all. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/10/07.) (Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS! THE MUSICAL
The classic holiday story, adapted for the stage, returns. Jack O'Brien directs. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

DORIS TO DARLENE, A CAUTIONARY VALENTINE
Jordan Harrison's play interweaves stories from the eighteen-sixties, while Wagner is writing his "Liebestod"; the nineteen-sixties, when a young woman becomes a pop star; and the present day. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FARNSWORTH INVENTION
Hank Azaria and Jimmi Simpson star in a new play by Aaron Sorkin, about Philo Farnsworth, the boy genius who invented television, and David Sarnoff, the head of R.C.A., who challenged his patent ownership. Des McAnuff directs. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

IS HE DEAD?
Michael Blakemore directs this recently unearthed comedy by Mark Twain. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

MAUDIE & JANE
Luciano Nattino adapted a Doris Lessing novel for this drama, in which a bag lady persuades a fashion editor to take care of her. Judith Malina and Pat Russell star. (Living Theatre, 19 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

NO DICE
Nature Theatre of Oklahoma brings a sendup of amateur dinner theatre. Directed by Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper. (66 White St. 212-868-4444.)

OH, THE HUMANITY AND OTHER EXCLAMATIONS
Five penetrating short plays by Will Eno, who wrote "Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)," find ordinary characters—a sports coach, an airline spokeswoman, a pair of lonely hearts—caught in moments of paralyzing uncertainty. Marisa Tomei, who exudes warmth even in the cold light of Eno's blankly existential scenarios, stars alongside Brian Hutchison, a sad-eyed Everyman with Little League-dad good looks. In an hour's running time they offer a banquet of bleakness, each playlet displaying Eno's ability to marry the quotidian and the metaphysical, the mournful and the mordantly funny. In one scene, two photographers instruct their subjects—us—to look "more mortal." It's a testament to this modest production that we are willing to oblige them. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

OUR SINATRA
A musical revue featuring the songs of Ol' Blue Eyes returns to New York. (Broadway Comedy Club, 318 W. 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

PIAF: LOVE CONQUERS ALL
This biographical musical by Roger Peace, about the iconic French chanteuse, played at New York's Fringe Festival this year. Naomi Emmerson stars. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

PUMPGIRL
The Irish playwright Abbie Spallen wrote this drama, set in rural Ireland, about a gas-station attendant, the race-car driver she is obsessed with, and his wife. Carolyn Cantor directs. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

QUEENS BOULEVARD (THE MUSICAL)
This exuberant theatrical collage, by Charles Mee, is based on an Indian dance drama, with bits of the Odyssey thrown in—not to mention James Joyce, Iranian folk music, blogs, and Abba. The story concerns an Indian bridegroom (Amir Arison) who sets out to find a mysterious flower for his Japanese-Chinese bride (Michi Barall). Along the way, he gets sidetracked at a number of Queens locales—Scylla and Charybdis turn up as a night club—as his anxious wife awaits. There's an unmistakable off-kilter rhythm to be found in Mee's

SILJA GÖTZ

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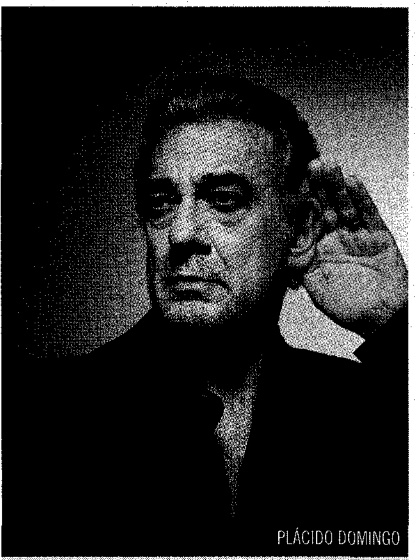

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— *Plácido Domingo*

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cut-and-paste script, and while "Queens Boulevard" is more meandering than some of his other works it certainly is fun to watch, owing in large part to its buoyant, multi-ethnic cast. (Peter Norton Space, *555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.*)

REBEL VOICES
Rob Urbinati's "Rebel Voices," which is based on Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove's "Voices of a People's History of the United States," announces itself in the program with an epigram about struggle and has the gall to call itself a play. In fact, it is a shabbily mounted, inadequately performed (the actors aren't even off book) compilation of contrarian pronouncements. One by one, yanked out of historical context, the renegade voices—Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Chief Joseph, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Moody, June Jordan, and Daniel Ellsberg among them—deliver their bright embers of outrage. "Rebel Voices" doesn't so much have its fist in the air as its hand on its heart. (12/10/07) (*Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.* Through Dec. 16.)

RUNT OF THE LITTER
The former pro football player Bo Eason's semi-autobiographical play, about sibling rivalry in a high-achieving family, premières at 37 Arts. Eason stars. (450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE SEAFARER
Conor McPherson's new play is set in Dublin on Christmas Eve. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

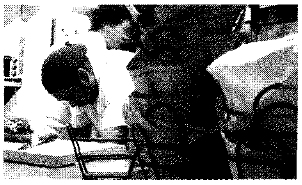
TRUMPERY
The new play by Peter Parnell ("QED") offers a glimpse into the life of Charles Darwin (Michael Cristofer) and the forces that shaped his completion of "On the Origin of Species." As the story begins, Darwin's beloved daughter is dying and his wife is devoutly religious; he is reluctant to reveal his theory of natural selection to a world dominated by Christian thought. When he receives a letter from an explorer named Wallace, who has come up with the same theory, his fear of being trumped compels him to publish. Cristofer ably reveals Darwin's angst; Neal Huff's entertaining turn as Darwin's defender Thomas Henry Huxley adds welcome levity to a script that often indicates more emotion than it provokes. Directed by David Esbjornson. (Atlantic Theatre Company, *336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.*)

YELLOW FACE
David Henry Hwang's play was inspired by his protest against the hiring of Jonathan Pryce for the original Broadway production of "Miss Saigon." (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BROTHERS SIZE:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE CONSTANT COUPLE:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DAI (ENOUGH):** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **DIE MOMMIE DIE!:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE GLORIOUS ONES:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **GONE MISSING:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **THE OVERWHELMING:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **PETER AND JERRY:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **THE PIANO TEACHER:** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. **PYGMALION:** American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Through Dec. 16. **THE RECEPTIONIST:** City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **ROCK 'N' ROLL:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SPEECH & DEBATE:** Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene

TABLES FOR TWO
BACK FORTY



HONORE BROWN

190 Avenue B (212-388-1990)—Traditionally, the "back forty" is the most far-flung parcel of land on a farm, where, out of sight, it's easy to be up to no good. At this recently opened East Village spot, however, the phrase has a more innocent connotation: it refers to the acres a farmer sets aside from his regular crop, for planting whatever he fancies. Certainly Back Forty is a playful departure for its co-owner and chef, Peter Hoffman, who has run the sophisticated Savoy, in SoHo, for seventeen years. Back Forty proclaims itself, somewhat disingenuously, to be a mere burger joint—but the burger is made of grass-fed beef that's thrillingly juicy and the impeccably crisp fries are sifted with rosemary-laced sea salt. As at Savoy, the buzzword here is sustainability, with a seasonal menu that reflects Hoffman's longstanding relationships with local growers.

Back Forty shies away from outright rusticity, preferring Shaker simplicity, albeit as if filtered through the mind of John Pawson: the walls are spare and high, adorned here and there with ikebana-esque groupings of antique farm tools, tall glass cylinders stacked with apples, and curiously shaped gourds with elongated necks; electric candelabra are suspended from the ceiling in clear globes. There are touches of quaintness—a glass of wine comes to the table in a milk quartino, water is poured from recycled whiskey bottles, and candles flicker inside canning jars—but the china is resolutely modern, and the over-all ambience is one of easy, improvisational elegance.

The philosophy behind the cooking is just as deceptively simple: confront the ingredient. Flavors are asserted, never masked, resulting in dishes that are vividly contrapuntal. The almost shocking bitterness of radicchio is met by earthy cranberry beans and cubes of feta embedded with crushed almonds, hazelnuts, cumin, and coriander. Familiar vegetables and legumes take on unrecognizable forms: lentils are as small and delicate as caviar; cauliflower, melded with Gruyère, bread crumbs, and leeks, achieves uncanny tenderness (and perfectly mimics macaroni and cheese). Occasionally the accompaniments nearly upstage the main dishes, like the cilantro salsa verde lightly drizzled over the whole grilled trout or the kicky smoked paprika mayo, which one might feel compelled to put on everything. Cocktails, mixed at a twenty-two-foot bar of reclaimed pine, reveal a similar attention to detail; the standout is the Loisaida Sling, which gets its sass from cachaça and ginger beer dashed with chipotle—an eye-opener that will remind you that Avenue B was once a walk on the wild side. (Open daily for dinner and Sundays for brunch. Entrées $10-24.)

—Ligaya Mishan

O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ABRONS ARTS CENTER
466 Grand St., at Pitt St. (212-598-0400)—The composer and percussionist Susie Ibarra, whose parents hail from Manila, has made her mark on the avant, jazz, and experimental scenes playing with the likes of John Zorn, William Parker, and Sylvie Courvoisier. With her husband and fellow downtown percussionist Roberto Rodriguez, she has a Filipino trip-hop project called **Electric Kulintang.** Ibarra plays the *kulintang* (an eight-gong instrument from the Southern Philippines that also lends its name to a style of music with a rich folk tradition), keyboards, and other instruments. Rodriguez contributes electronic effects (including field recordings from their travels in the Philippines) and percussion. The group, which will be joined by the guitarist Oz Noy, is here on Dec. 14, as part of the "Blurring Boundaries" series, curated by Melissa Caruso Scott, a co-founder of the recently departed music venue Tonic.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 11-12: **Daryl Hall and John Oates,** stalwarts of blue-eyed Philly soul and timeless staples of lite rock radio, have turned into carollers with the rerelease of last year's album "Home for Christmas," a collection of both traditional and pop-tinged Yuletide favorites. Dec. 15: **Hot Tuna Electric.** The guitarist Jorma Kaukonen and the bassist Jack Casady have been dipping into American folk, blues, and rock and roll for more than forty years. They show no sign of slowing down.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 14-15: The funk-steeped jam band **Deep Banana Blackout.**

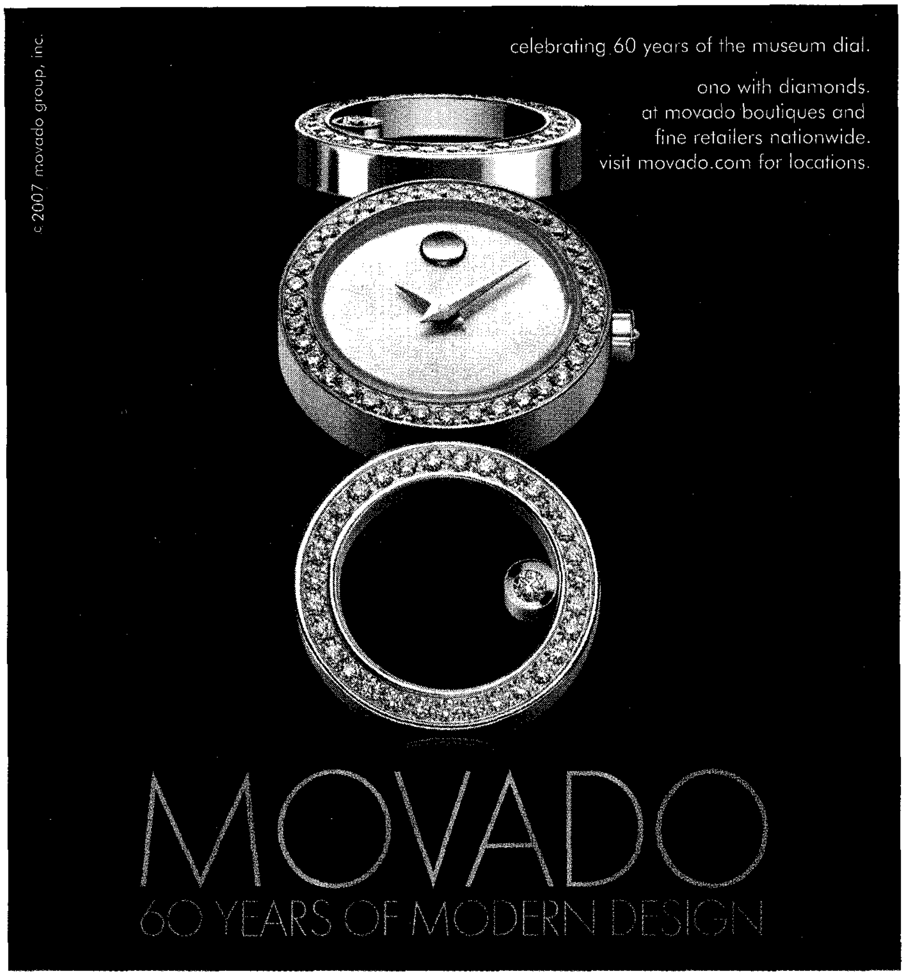
CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE
Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. (866-468-7619)—Dec. 13-15: **Paul Winter** and his Consort celebrate the winter solstice.

GRAND BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Last year, the singer-songwriter **Aimee Mann** released a Christmas album, "One More Drifter in the Snow," and held a touring variety show and concert. She returns to celebrate the season on Dec. 14, with the comedians **Fred Armisen** and **Paul F. Tompkins** and the musicians **Josh Ritter** and **Ben Lee** in tow.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Dec. 12: **Raul Malo,** the former leader of the beloved country-rock band the Mavericks, is maturing into a classic vocal interpreter. His new release, "After Hours," dresses up old country hits in supper-club attire.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 17: The young Bronx-born neo-soul singer **Stephanie McKay** drops by for a night of earthy acoustic songs.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—Dec. 13: **We Are Wolves,** a hyperkinetic group from Montreal, trades in jerky, electrified dance punk. Dec. 13-14: **GZA,** of the Wu-Tang Clan, generates fewer headlines than some of his colleagues, and his solo work (notably his second solo album, "Liquid Swords," from 1995) is highly regarded. Dec. 15: An evening of mechanized chaos ensues as the industrial underdogs **Chemlab** join forces with **U.S.S.A.,** a new ensemble featuring the Jesus Lizard guitar-strangler Duane Denison and the former Ministry bassist Paul Barker. The equally volatile local favorite **Skeleton Key** is also on the bill.



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"LET'S ZYDECO"
The admirable concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana takes a break from its usual fare for a holiday party with the local honky-tonk and rockabilly band **Li'l Mo** and the **Monicats.** (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com. Dec. 16.)

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
2 W. 64th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 13: A stellar lineup takes the stage to help the non-commercial radio station WFUV fill its coffers. **Loudon Wainwright III,** the folk legend whose latest album, "Strange Weirdos," features songs from and inspired by the movie "Knocked Up," will be on hand, along with, among others, **Madeleine Peyroux,** the country-blues singer with an uncanny resemblance to Lady Day, **Dan Wilson,** the former Semisonic front man, and **Suzanne Vega,** the pioneering folkie who is also referred to by some as the "mother of the MP3" since her a-cappella version of "Tom's Diner" was used by the German audio engineer Karlheinz Brandenburg to help perfect the audio-file format in the early nineties. Dec. 15: The acerbic, cabaret-tinged material of the singer-songwriter **Nellie McKay.**

ST. ANN'S WAREHOUSE
38 Water St., Brooklyn (718-254-8779)—Dec. 13-15: The **Tiger Lillies,** a Weimar-enamored British trio led by the singer and accordionist Martyn Jacques, returns with a macabre seasonal spectacle called "Suicide for Christmas." Culled from both unreleased and older material, this holiday show features dark and sometimes comic oompah-tinged cabaret songs about suicide, cocaine, and more suicide. Whatever depravity they happen to be singing about, the centerpiece of the trio's sound is Jacques's remarkable falsetto, a throaty and convincing East End take on a nineteenth-century castrati. Adrian Stout and Adrian Huge, the singer's longtime cohorts on bass and drums, ground Jacques's soaring voice nicely with junk-yard rhythms reminiscent of Tom Waits.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Dec. 12-13: **Cake,** the pride of Sacramento, California, has built a dedicated following for its witty and charming pop. With the sleek global sounds of New York's own **Brazilian Girls,** among others.

UNITED PALACE
4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 12-13, Dec. 15-16, and Dec. 18-19: The irascible classic rocker **Neil Young.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 11-15: The **Roy Haynes** quartet.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Unite the pop aspirations of Herb Alpert with the stylistic affects of Miles Davis and Chet Baker, and you might just hit upon the essence of **Chris Botti.** The fabulously successful trumpeter settles in here for the better part of the month, Dec. 10-25.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 11-16: The same attributes that made **Bobby Watson and Horizon** one of the top bands of the nineties—the saxophonist Watson's funky flair, the trumpeter **Terell Stafford's** poise, and **Victor Lewis's** masterful drumming and compelling tunes—continue to sustain the quintet in its rejuvenated form.

HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ
An aggregate of esteemed jazz neo-traditionalists including the guitarist **Howard Alden,** the clarinet and saxophone player **Ken Peplowski,** and the doyen of jazz historicism, the pianist **Dick Hyman,** presides over a program of early jazz. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. Dec. 13.)

Aimee Mann brings her Christmas show to the Grand Ballroom.

FRANK STOCKTON

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 11-16: **David Sánchez,** a modernist saxophonist who keeps his Puerto Rican roots in clear sight, leads a quartet with the African guitar sensation **Lionel Loueke.**

METROPOLITAN ROOM
34 W. 22nd St. (212-206-0440)—Dec. 15 and Saturdays through Dec. 29: Pop standards, the Great American Songbook, and down-and-dirty personal ruminations are all channelled through the larger-than-life stage persona of the cabaret demi-legend **Baby Jane Dexter.**

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Dec. 13: During its late-eighties and early-nineties heyday, the saxophone-rich **Microscopic Septet** drew on a cache of inspired improvisers, and two of the era's most sophisticated and stylistically slippery jazz composers and players—the pianist **Joel Forrester** and the soprano saxophonist **Phillip Johnston.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 11-16: The **Jim Hall** trio. Some guitarists are bent on cramming together as many notes as possible. Hall plays the instrument with a jeweller's touch: a gorgeous chord here, a lyrical phrase there. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZANKEL HALL
Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Dec. 12: The **Bad Plus**—the pianist Ethan Iverson, the bassist Reid Anderson, and the drummer David King—haven't turned out to be the future of jazz. But the three still have plenty of tricks up their sleeves, and luckily their canny originals are of more enduring interest than the rock adaptations that gained them fame.

ZINC BAR
90 W. Houston St. (212-477-8337)—Dec. 18-19: **Ignacio Berroa,** a seasoned drummer so comfortable with both jazz swing and Afro-Cuban rhythms that he blurs the lines between them, leads his own unit, drawing on work from his 2006 début album, "Codes."

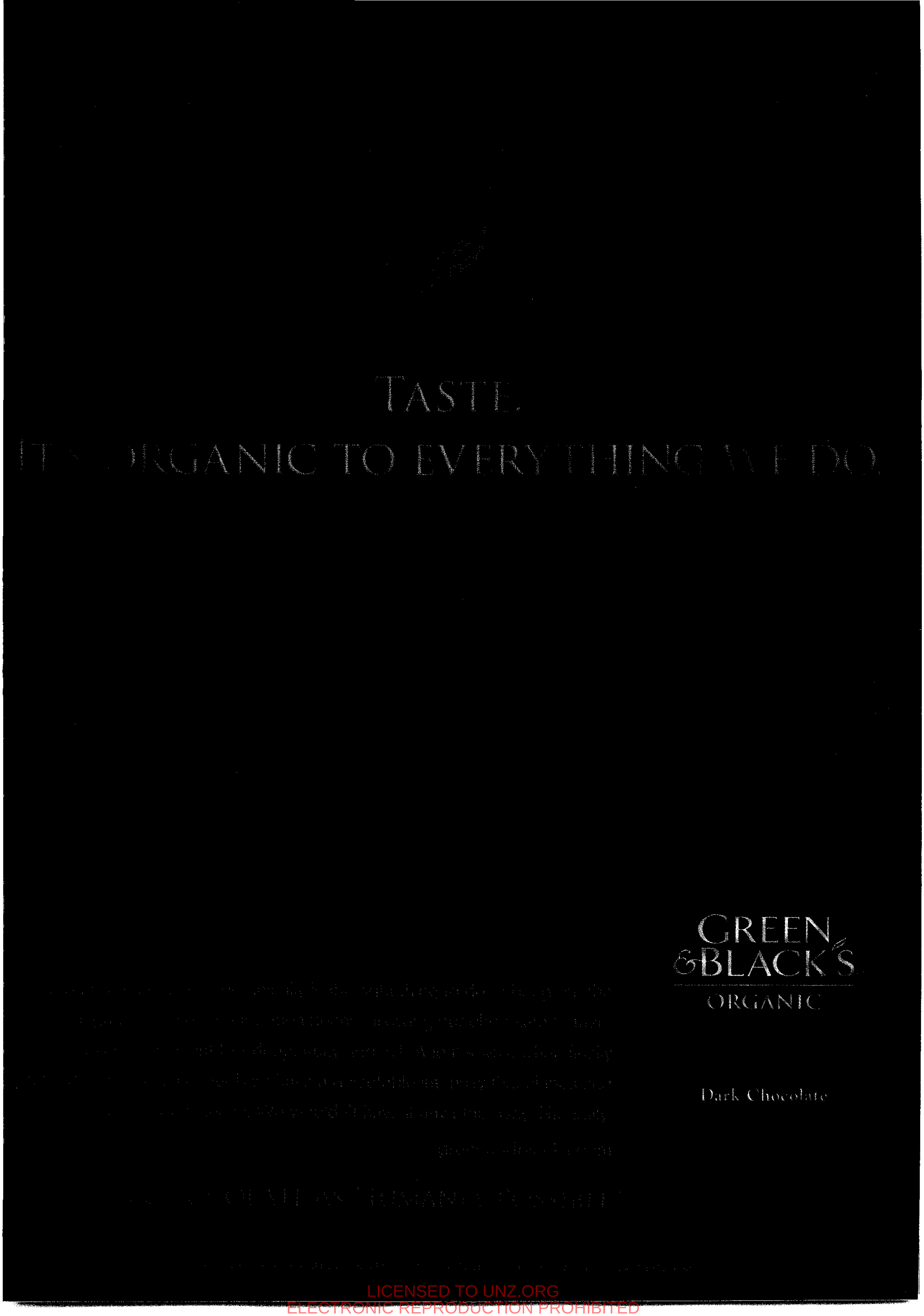
ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Age of Rembrandt."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary."** Through March 2. ♦ **"The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance Masterpiece."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Tara Donovan at the Met."** Donovan has a knack for turning vast quantities of everyday objects—drinking straws, Scotch tape, straight pins—into extraordinary sculptures and installations that transcend the sum of their parts. Here, she's covered the walls of the Gioconda and Joseph King gallery in the Met's contemporary wing with linked circles of reflective tape. The thin edge of the tape disappears when viewed head-on, and reflected light puddles in the cells. The walls look as though they might be covered in water drops or sequins. As with previous projects, the work takes on an organic quality in its proliferation; the arrangement of plastic clusters suggests a beautiful bloom of algae, collapsing soap bubbles, or archipelagos. Through April 27. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Puryear."** Through Jan. 14. ♦ **"Georges Seurat: The Drawings."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings."** Opens Dec. 16. ♦ **"New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930-2006: Selections from a Decade of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 25. ♦ **"Projects 86: Gert & Uwe Tobias."** Through Feb. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Richard Prince: Spiritual America."** Through Jan. 8. ♦ **"Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945."** Through Jan. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)



TASTE.

IT'S ORGANIC TO EVERYTHING WE DO.

GREEN & BLACK'S
ORGANIC

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Dark Chocolate

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WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Lawrence Weiner: As Far As the Eye Can See."** Weiner, a pioneer of language-based art, appears in finest fettle in his first U.S. retrospective: intelligent, provocative, allusive, and, for all his insistence on the word, vitally engaged with visual pleasure. Forty years' worth of work fits elegantly into the artist-designed installation, which intersperses his signature sans-serif wall texts—"drops of blue water forced over the rim of a pot made of clay," one reads—with works that realize conceptual instructions. (A chipped gray square is a "removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wallboard from a wall.") Early paintings, a flock of posters, and a vitrine of the artist's books, drawings, and multiples amplify the brio. Through Feb. 10. ♦ **"Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love."** Through Feb. 3. ♦ **"Beth Campbell: Following Room."** Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art."** Through Jan. 27. ♦ **"Brushed with Light: American Landscape Watercolors from the Collection."** Through Jan. 27. ♦ **"Global Feminisms Remix."** Through Feb. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Water: H_2O = Life"** Through May 26. ♦ For the next few months, around five hundred specimens will flit through the Butterfly Conservatory, a pocket-size hothouse planted with orchids and other rain-forest flora. Through May 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)."** Through Jan. 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"From The New Yorker to Shrek: The Art of William Steig."** Through March 16. ♦ **"Camille Pissarro: Impressions of City and Country."** Through Feb. 3. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Painted with Words: Vincent van Gogh's Letters to Émile Bernard."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Drawing Connections: Baselitz, Kelly, Penone, Rockburne, and the Old Masters."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"John Sloane's New York."** Through Feb. 24. ♦ **"The Glory Days: New York Baseball, 1847-1957."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Manhattan Noon: Photographs by Gus Powell."** Opens Dec. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—The museum inaugurates its new building with **"Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century,"** an international survey of recent sculpture that examines the antiheroic tendency in contemporary art. Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kori Newkirk: 1997-2007."** Through March 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

LYNNE COHEN
These black-and-white photographs of public and private interiors appear to be deadpan documents of the sort that you might find in a failing suburban real-estate office. They zero in on areas or objects that are, in Cohen's words, "incongruous or pathetic": a crudely patched Naugahyde couch, a stack of televisions alongside a curved wall of glass bricks, a child's chair and a Colonel Sanders figurine on checkerboard linoleum. This smartly edited selection of pictures from the past thirty years emphasizes Cohen's starker, wittier work and suggests that she be seen in the company of such shrewd observers of the everyday as William Eggleston, Ed Ruscha, and Stephen Shore. Through Dec. 22. (Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006.)

JOHN RITTER

DVD NOTES
THE BIBLICAL SENSE

"Superbad" (Sony), a comedy set in the milieu of graduating seniors at a suburban high school, begins with pornography. The loud, large, and ribald Seth (Jonah Hill) calls his best friend, the slight, circumspect Evan (Michael Cera), to discuss in fulsome detail a Web site called "Vag-Tastic Voyage." The boys talk constantly about sex, and the story runs on their efforts to get laid, but what they want, besides pleasure, is knowledge—as Seth explains, "to be good at sex by the time you get to college." They plan to impress girls by getting the liquor for a big party with the help of a third friend, Fogel (Christopher Mintz-Plasse), an ultimate nerd with a fake I.D., and the film follows the trio as their efforts go crazily awry and turn into a long, wild night.

Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg started work on the script at age thirteen, and their eponymous characters' banter and pranks have the ring of truth (as coaxed into life by the director, Greg Mottola). But Judd Apatow, one of the producers, helped shape the material and give it a moral point: there's no such thing as theoretical knowledge. Despite the hypersexualized culture that kids grow up in, they really know nothing about sex; yet the clever ones, like the heroes of the film, recognize their ignorance and take the impulsive, risky leap into action. The resulting adventure becomes more important to them than the fulfillment of their desire; the process that's dramatized is nothing less than growing up.

As the remarkably accomplished, sad, and troubling comedy **"Unscrewed"** (Other Side) shows, it isn't only teens who are ignorant about sex. This mockumentary, written and directed by Leslie Shearing with improvisations by the LabRats troupe, depicts an upwardly mobile young couple, Mary (Heather Smith), an advertising executive, and Joe (Hans Hoffman), a graphic designer, who, after six years of marriage, have lost the spark in bed and try to regain it, with the help of a sex therapist (Douglas Manes), a urologist (Shearing herself, speaking with an outrageous Eastern European accent), and a Tantric-yoga group that puts Mary in touch with her "yoni" and with Joe's prostate.

Each intervention—whether the "replacement therapy," in which the couple play-acts in bed for the therapist, the doctor's examinations, prescriptions, and self-stimulation exercises, or the yogis' erotic dances of liberation—seems more depressing and futile than the last. The self-sacrificing and utterly fearless performers never yield to the temptation of parody; the results, for all the dry, absurd comedy, are complex and moving, with a sadness born of shining the harsh light of reason on what, for better or worse, remains the greatest mystery.

—*Richard Brody*

NINA KATCHADOURIAN
Katchadourian's fourteen-channel video considers the surreality of "enrichment," a zoo-keeper's euphemism for habitats and toys used to beguile animals stressed by captivity. In one projection, polar bears execute a joyful underwater ballet but keep gliding out of the frame, so a silly yellow ball dominates the image. Penguins are fed while a gawking crowd obstructs the camera's view; on a monitor, a giraffe compulsively exercises its massive tongue. A second piece, titled "Continuum of Cute," lays out a row of animal photographs culled from the Internet, progressing from mangled dog to woolly lamb. Through Dec. 22. (Meltzer, 525 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330.)

YASUMASA MORIMURA
Morimura is best known for meticulously staged self-portraits, cross-dressing photographs that bring layers of empathy, comedy, and pop-culture savvy to female impersonation. He takes on meaty, masculine roles in a new series titled "Requiem for the XX Century: Twilight of the Turbulent Gods." Using makeup and sophisticated computer manipulation, the artist portrays not just Mao, Lenin, Einstein, Yukio Mishima, Che Guevara, and Charlie Chaplin's Hitler but every figure in a photo reënacting Jack Ruby's shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald, and both executioner and executed in Eddie Adams's famous image from Vietnam. The most elaborate of these images are exceptionally clever tours de force, but even the simplest have undeniable iconic power and sly insight into the pitfalls of masculinity. Through Dec. 22. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

HEATHER ROWE
Rowe clearly admires Gordon Matta-Clark, but there's nothing wrong with that—particularly when the results are this thoughtfully crafted. Her single-sculpture installation takes a 1972 Paul Rudolph house, recently demolished in Westport, Connecticut, as its starting point, then flips interior and exterior, including bits of broken glass, mirror, and tile on the outer side of the simple triangular structure. As with her contribution to the Whitney Altria's current show, "Undone," Rowe plays a daredevil game with subtlety; the Whitney work risks blending into the proverbial woodwork. Here, the installation is carefully balanced between two columns. Given the run of the gallery, she makes measured use of it. Through Dec. 22. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

THOMAS RUFF
The German photographer's latest exhibition is, uncharacteristically, an extension of his previous one: more jpegs found on the Internet have been blown up to monumental scale. His subjects in-

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clude the ruins of the World Trade Center, atomic-bomb tests, a rocket liftoff, and an exploratory vehicle on the surface of the moon, but charged historic images are outnumbered by generic landscapes (forests, lakes, and rushing rivers) that flirt with romance only to deny its possibility. Each of these photographs disintegrates up close, where you're face to face with a patchwork of pixels—digitized Impressionism, flat and cold. Although twenty hulking pictures are overkill, Ruff as usual shows no mercy. Through Dec. 22. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

SHINIQUE SMITH
Smith's first solo outing at the gallery could use some editing, but it amply showcases her talent—in the Jessica Stockholder and Mike Kelley vein—for fashioning art works from everyday materials. Big sheets of foam, pieces of carpet, and sweaters are bound together into suggestively organic mounds. One Arte Povera-style ensemble features an ex-boyfriend's clothing and an abject pile of socks. Where to pare back? A video with goofy goth-punk "fairies" cavorting in the great outdoors would not be missed. A more-is-more artist, Smith would still benefit from letting it all hang out with a little less abandon. Through Dec. 29. (Hasson, 535 W. 25th St. 212-268-4444.)

JANSSON STEGNER
John Currin did yearbook photos; Stegner takes on the police. The formal links between Currin and Stegner are glaring in these paintings of long-limbed officers—male as well as female—in uniforms and knee-high boots, from the proportion-defying Mannerist bodies to the come-hither looks. Stegner also owes a debt to several centuries of portraiture, from Manet to Karen Kilimnik and Elizabeth Peyton, the high priestesses of academicism leavened with mock sentimentality. But derivative or not, there's something distinctly pleasing about these playfully conceived paintings. Through Dec. 22. (Bellwether, 134 Tenth Ave. 212-929-5959.)

SUSAN WIDES
For her aerial photographs of New York, Wides uses a popular technique that involves selective focus; large areas of her pictures are allowed to go soft and blurry so the eye is drawn to the sharp spot. Olivo Barbieri's current show at Yancey Richardson takes the same approach to magnificent waterfalls, but Wides tends to play down the spectacular nature of the effect, even as she invites us to swoon over Manhattan from the air. Eight photographs only skim her subject's surface, but the one of Sheep's Meadow bracketed between two high-rise buildings, its tiny occupants as unreal as scale-model toys, is worth the trip. Through Dec. 22. (Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 212-229-0044.)

Short List

JEREMY BLAKE: Kinz, Tillou, and Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500. Through Jan. 5. **BYRON DOBELL:** First Street, 526 W. 26th St. 646-336-8053. Through Dec. 22. **PIETER HUGO:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Jan. 12. **CARL OSTENDARP:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-925-7525. Through Jan. 12. **CHARLES RAY:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 19.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CAMERON MARTIN
Martin's spare, elegant paintings, all rendered in an otherworldly palette of grays, at first call to mind the lunar landscapes of Vija Celmins, or the early Gerhard Richter. Twists of driftwood, boulders, and rocky plains are rendered in dark grisaille, making the images seem dim at first, as if seen by weak starlight or through fog. There's something a little apocalyptic in these utterly lifeless landscapes—even the tree branches are long past any potential leafiness. One could look at these and imagine sets for a production of Cormac McCarthy's "The Road"; their relentless formal reduction speaks of lost worlds, or, perhaps, the stark start of a new one. Through Jan. 5. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444; and Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930.)

MARIKO MORI
Celtic standing stones, Japanese Jomon shrines, and the Super Kamiokande neutrino observatory at the University of Tokyo are reference points for Mariko Mori's trio of monumental sculptures. Cast in milky acrylic, ceramic, and glass, the objects softly glow; the towering "Tom Na H-iu" (named for what Mori calls a "site of spiritual transmigration") is also sporadically lit from within by pink, golden, and blue lights. These, we are told, register (via real-time) neutrinos captured at the Japanese observatory. While it's fun to imagine that we're seeing muons, the sculptures look more like sci-fi props. Through Dec. 22. (Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.)

Short List

URS FISCHER: Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Dec. 22. **PAUL MCCARTHY:** Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Jan. 5. **DO HO SUH:** Lehmann Maupin, 201 Chrystie St. 212-254-0054. Through Feb. 2.

Esther Robinson's documentary "A Walk Into the Sea" opens Dec. 14.

JOHN RITTER

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
George Balanchine's "Nutcracker," from 1954, with its magically growing tree and adorable angels, continues its run. Through Dec. 30. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Dec. 11-13 and Dec. 18 at 6, Dec. 14 at 8, Dec. 15 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 16 at 1 and 5. Through Feb. 24.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The third week of the City Center season sees the return of Ailey's "Flowers." Created in 1971 for the ballerina Lynn Seymour, the dance is a portrait of a fast-living, early-dying rock star based on Janis Joplin, set to recordings by Joplin, Pink Floyd, and Blind Faith. Robert Battle's spiralling duet "Unfold" and the early Ailey solo "Reflections in D" also enter the repertory. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 11 and Dec. 18 at 7, Dec. 12-14 at 8, Dec. 15 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 16 at 3 and 7:30. Through Dec. 31.)

MOLISSA FENLEY AND DANCERS
Fenley has been at it for thirty years. Her recent work tends to have a complex structure and an unpolished exterior, often placing two separate dances onstage simultaneously. That holds true for the premières in the two programs of her anniversary season at the Joyce. In "Calculus and Politics," a trio and a quartet negotiate a knotty Harry Partch score; in "Dreaming Awake," a soloist and a duo independently scroll through three phrase variations. Fenley's solo period is represented by "States of Darkness," her "Rite of Spring," performed alternately by two guests from the Pacific Northwest Ballet. The choreographer herself still dances, and on opening night her longtime collaborator Philip Glass plays live. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 11-12 at 7:30, Dec. 13-15 at 8, and Dec. 16 at 7:30.)

"AU REVOIR PARAPLUIE"
A wistful Orpheus dream, by the French nouveau-cirque master James Thiérrée. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 11-15 at 7:30 and Dec. 16 at 3.)

"FRAULEIN MARIA"
Doug Elkins's tongue-in-cheek take on "The Sound of Music" returns, revised and expanded. Selections from the iconic movie soundtrack (now including a couple of orchestral interludes) propel inventive and irreverent dance sketches. A cast of downtown luminaries, including Arthur Aviles, David Parker, Jennifer Nugent, and David Dorfman, gets into the absurdity, occasionally in drag. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Dec. 12 and Dec. 14 at 7:30 and Dec. 15 at 1:30 and 7:30.)

NEW SHANGHAI CIRCUS
The Chinese acrobat troupe continues its run. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Dec. 14 at 7, Dec. 15 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 16 at noon and 5. Through Jan. 6.)

KINDING SINDAW
The mission of this New York-based Filipino dance-and-music ensemble (whose name means "Dance of Light") and of its director, Potri Ranka Manis, is to preserve traditional performing arts of the indigenous tribes of the Southeast Asian nation. The evening-length work "Bembaran" intertwines two stories centered around the island of Mindanao, one from recent history (a bloody battle in the Philippine-American war) and one from its legendary past ("Darangen," an epic poem of the Maranao people). (La Mama, 74 E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Dec. 13-15 at 7:30 and Dec. 16 at 2:30 and 7:30. Through Dec. 23.)

"UNCIVIL WARS"
David Gordon, whose recent adaptations of Shakespeare and Ionesco have been smart and timely, takes on Bertolt Brecht's anti-Nazi parable "The Roundheads and the Pointheads." Michael Feingold's translation of the play gets mixed with Brecht's essays on playwriting, Hanns Eisler's thoughts on composing, Brecht's and Eisler's songs, and Gordon's movement. The cast includes Valda Setterfield, John Kelly, Dean Moss, and the actress Estelle Parsons. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Dec. 13-15 at 8. Through Dec. 22.)

YVONNE MEIER
Meier, who was born in Zurich and has been working in the U.S. since 1979, is a gutsy and impulsive improviser. Last year's "This Is Not a Pink Pony: Take 1 and 2" featured dancers in ape suits; her new piece, "Area 51," made in collaboration with the sculptor and performance artist Aki Sasamoto, further explores the simian theme, in the context of a bizarre world that combines the circus, the sideshow, and the art of the escape. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 13-15 at 8:30.)

JOFFREY BALLET SCHOOL
This elegantly traditional "Nutcracker," performed by the pre-professional students of the school, features a guest performance by George de la Peña (a former principal at American Ballet Theatre) as Dr. Drosselmeyer. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. Dec. 14 at 7, Dec. 15 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 16 at 2.)

"TAPPY HOLIDAYS"
Holiday songs performed by a jazz trio and whiz-kid tap dancers. Performers include several youth ensembles, along with pros like Jared Grimes and Mable Lee. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 14 at 8.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
Short and sweet, the chamber company's "Nutcracker" lasts an hour and features children in the roles of mice, angels, and the Russian acrobat. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Dec. 14 at 10 A.M. and Dec. 15-16 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through Dec. 30.)

VALENTINA KOZLOVA / DANCE CONSERVATORY ACADEMY
Valentina Kozlova, a former Bolshoi dancer, presents students from her Dance Conservatory Academy in a "Nutcracker" that features an eccentric Aunty Drosselmeyer (played by the choreographer Margo Sappington), who performs magic tricks and a Sugarplum Fairy played by a fifteen-year-old ballerina (Whitney Jensen). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 15 at 4 and 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Gounod's **"Roméo et Juliette"** returns for the holidays with the magnetic Anna Netrebko and Roberto Alagna in the title roles, supported by the excellent Isabel Leonard, Nathan Gunn, and Robert Lloyd; Plácido Domingo conducts. (Dec. 12 at 8 and Dec. 15 at 1.) ♦ First seen at the Met in 2002, **"War and Peace"**—Prokofiev's sprawling adaptation of the Tolstoy novel—was one of the great triumphs of the Jo-

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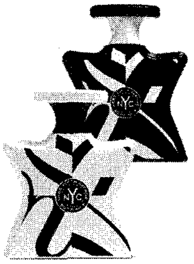

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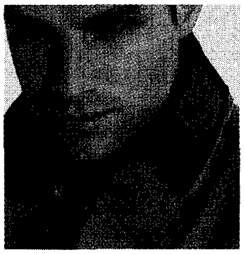

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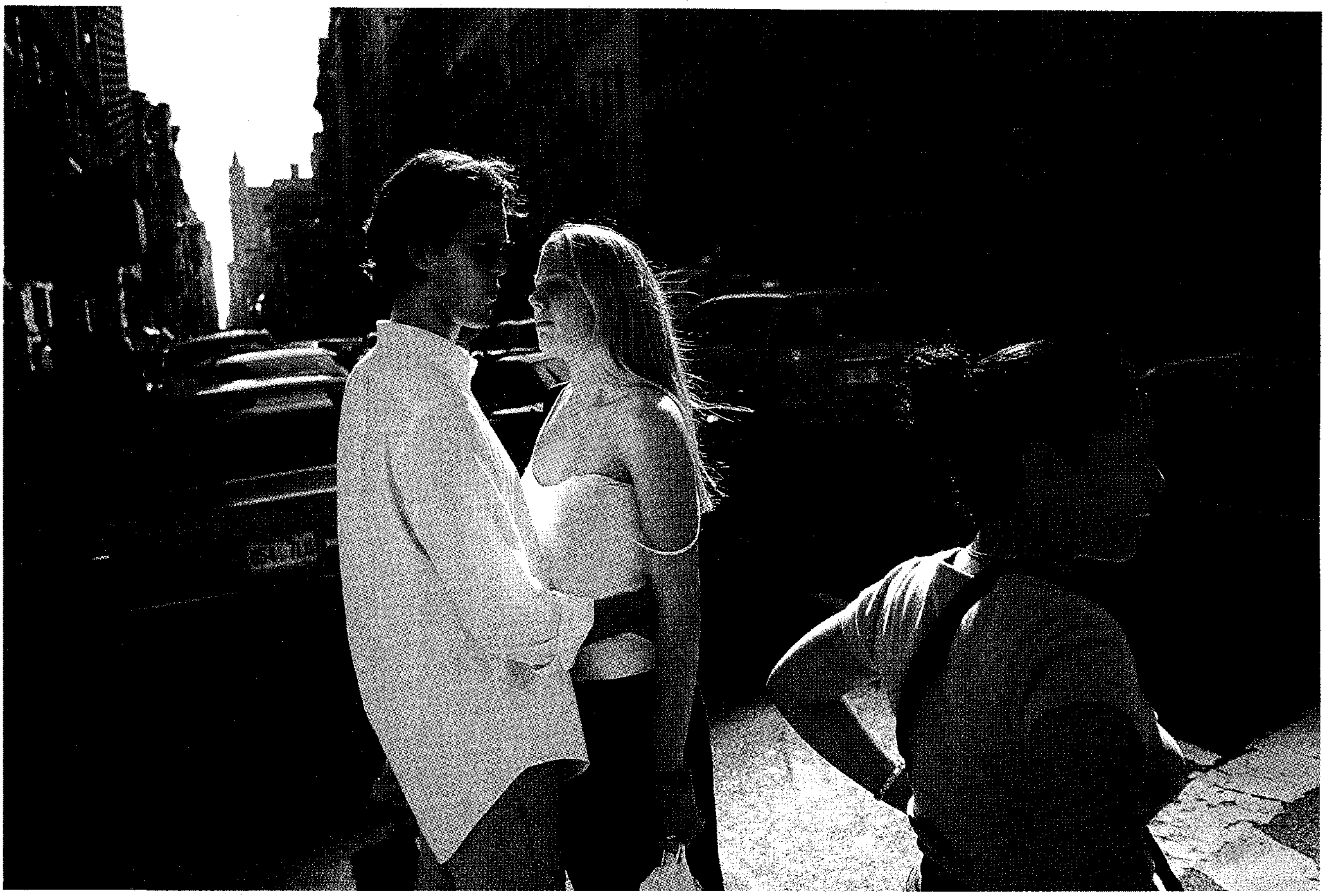

Gus Powell's photograph "For J. Singer Sargent," in his exhibition "Manhattan Noon," at the Museum of the City of New York.

seph Volpe regime, not least because it featured the Met début of Anna Netrebko. Peter Gelb revives Andrei Konchalovsky's production (which features sets by George Tsypin) for a run that brings back some original cast members (such as Ekaterina Semenchuk, Vassily Gerello, and Samuel Ramey); the indomitable Valery Gergiev is in the pit. (Dec. 13, Dec. 15, and Dec. 18 at 7:30.) ♦ In such seminal works as **"Iphigénie en Tauride"** (based on the play by Euripides), Gluck gave voice to the emotions of his immortal characters through music of elegant simplicity and force. But the various elements of Stephen Wadsworth's new production work at cross-purposes, so it's best to just sit back and enjoy the vocal feast—the lyrical ardor of Paul Groves's Pylade, the heroic heft of Plácido Domingo's Oreste, and the tonal sunset glow of Susan Graham's Iphigénie; Louis Langrée conducts. (Dec. 14 at 8.) ♦ Piero Faggioni's production of **"Un Ballo in Maschera"** is hardly a triumph of imagination, but it has always provided a fine platform for the house's finer Verdi singers. The latest cast, which doesn't lack for stars, includes Michèle Crider, Ofelia Sala, Stephanie Blythe, Salvatore Licitra, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; Gianandrea Noseda. (Dec. 17 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK: "I DUE FOSCARI"
Eve Queler, that diligent custodian of the outer reaches of the repertory, begins her thirty-seventh season at OONY's helm with Verdi's early melodrama, an adaptation of Byron's tragedy about a fifteenth-century Venetian doge and his rebellious son. Visual projections evoking the magnificence of the city will complement a concert performance featuring the soprano Julianna Di Giacomo, the tenor Aquiles Machado, and the baritone Paolo Gavanelli. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 13 at 7:30.)

AMATO OPERA: "LA BOHÈME"
Puccini's timeless Latin Quarter romance is offered at an appropriately intimate setting, Anthony Amato's charming, homey shoebox theatre in the East Village. Through Jan. 13. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Dec. 15 at 7:30 and Dec. 16 at 2:30.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM: "MUSIC FOR THE SPIRIT"
The new-music mezzo-soprano Mary Nessinger joins a quartet of cellists (including Priscilla Lee and Clancy Newman) for a stylish Christmas concert that features music by Bach, Falla, and Pärt in the Medieval Sculpture Hall. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 13 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK
Frederick Renz's long-established group offers a new holiday program this year: "A Dutch Christmas," featuring a festive round of sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century carols, Latin motets, and drinking songs for the "Nieuw Jaar." (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-280-0330. Dec. 16 at 3.)

"MESSIAH"
This week's performances of Handel's beloved "entertainment" on Christian themes are to be found at Trinity Church Wall Street, which boasts a superb choir in the Anglican tradition conducted by Owen Burdick; the Rebel Baroque Orchestra accompanies them. (Broadway at Wall St. 212-602-0800. Dec. 16 at 3 and Dec. 18 at 7:30.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: "A PIPER'S NOËL"
Ciaramella, an American ensemble of recorders, sackbuts, bagpipes, and the like (and four singing friends), makes its New York début in a holiday mood, offering a variety of polyphonic music ranging from the medieval and Renaissance periods (by such composers as Binchois, Isaac, Brumel, and Josquin) to nineteenth-century America. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Dec. 16 at 4.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: GUGGENHEIM HOLIDAY CONCERT
With his duties at Miller Theatre done for the year, George Steel alights at Frank Lloyd Wright's museum to conduct his Vox Vocal Ensemble and the Graham Ashton Brass Ensemble in what might be the widest range of Christmas selections around—from music by Scheidt and Praetorius to works by Britten, Mendelssohn, and Mel Tormé. Traditional carols (such as "Once in Royal David's City") will not be neglected. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. Dec. 16-17 at 6. No tickets required.)

GALAPAGOS: "OPERA ON TAP"
An irreverent evening of Christmas classical will be offered at Williamsburg's slacker-glamorous bar and performance venue, where the freewheeling group of singers—featuring three antlered Valkyries—offers some holiday favorites. Cookies and hot toddies included. (Galapagos Art Space, 70 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-782-5188. Dec. 17 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Not all of December's music will be jolly and light. The début concerts of the young Russian conductor Andrey Boreyko will begin with effervescent works by Ibert and Ravel (the Piano Concerto in G Major, with Hélène Grimaud) but will close with Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony, a dark and turbulent piece with an irresistible sweep and energy informed by the composer's early work in film music. (Dec. 13 at 7:30 and Dec. 15 at 8.) ♦ Note: Boreyko will also conduct the symphony by itself during a shorter "Rush Hour" concert (Dec. 12 at 6:45) and in one of the orchestra's occasional "Inside the Music" programs, in which a full performance will be preceded by a discussion with Boreyko and Gerard McBurney that will feature dramatic readings from Shostakovich's writings as well as film footage from the Stalinist era (Dec. 14 at 8). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

COSMOPOLITAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Bun-Ching Lam, one of the more prominent members of the group of Asian-American composers that has emerged in the past two decades, conducts two of her works (including "Saudades de

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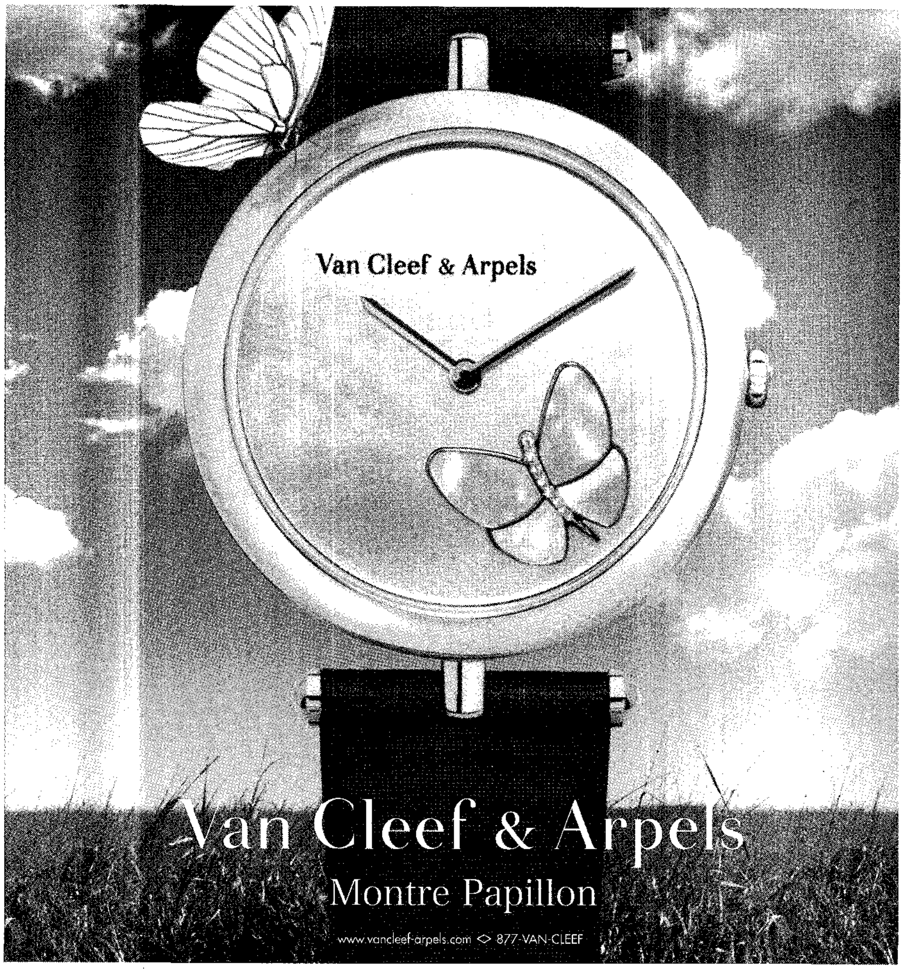

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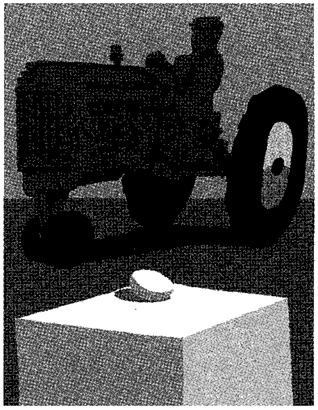
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TRIPLE PLAY

Shows of new sculpture by the L.A. artist Charles Ray are rare—his labor-intensive works may be years in the making—and reliably amazing. He targets aesthetic and conceptual bull's-eyes that you didn't know existed. So it is with his three pieces at Matthew Marks. "Father Figure" is an enormous blowup, in machined and glossily painted solid steel, of an old (made in America, that old) plastic toy tractor with a benignly beefy driver. It weighs a Richard Serra-esque eighteen and a half tons. "The New Beetle" is a life-size nude, cast in steel and painted white, of a young boy seated on the floor and playing with a toy Volkswagen. Its astute beauty reflects Ray's ongoing fascination with the integration of realism and abstraction in Classic Greek sculpture. Then there's the tiny "Chicken," a pedestalled egg in white painted steel with a circular cutout revealing a porcelain chick about to be born. The gristly little bird struggles to get out; we look in. The show seems to be about childhood as an ever-recurring state of nature, history, and the soul.



—*Peter Schjeldahl*

Macau") along with pieces by Chen Yi and Dorothy Chang in a concert at Town Hall. (123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. Dec. 16 at 2.)

RECITALS

STEVEN ISSERLIS AND KIRILL GERSTEIN
In their only New York appearance of the season, the lauded British cellist and the up-and-coming Russian pianist collaborate in a program anchored by the sonatas for cello and piano by Shostakovich and Prokofiev. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 13 at 8.)

JEFFREY KAHANE: "GOLDBERG VARIATIONS"
The American pianist performs and discusses Bach's reflective masterwork in a concert presented by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788. Dec. 14 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
Dec. 14 at 8: The floating chamber-music series continues its recent trend of imaginative programming with an evening devoted to the richly expressive music of the jazz-classical pianist Fred Hersch, in which Hersch and another fine pianist, Blair McMillen, team up with the Gramercy Trio. ♦ Dec. 15 at 8 and Dec. 16 at 4: The young and eager Zukofsky Quartet plays string quartets by Kreisler, Verdi, and an unexpected choice, Milton Babbitt (No. 2, from 1954). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS
New York's élite chamber musicians take on Bach's joyous concertos, performing them this year at the Rose Theatre. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-875-5788. Dec. 16 at 5 and Dec. 18 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER MUSIC
Members of the orchestra (including the violinist Sheryl Staples and the clarinettist Mark Nuccio) join this week's concerto partner, the pianist Hélène Grimaud, in sonatas with piano accompaniment by Brahms and Schumann. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 16 at 8.)

"PERSPECTIVES": YEFIM BRONFMAN
Carnegie Hall offers carte blanche to the magnificent Israeli pianist, who continues his concert series with a solo recital featuring Schumann's Fantasy in C Major, Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit," and Balakirev's "Islamey." (212-247-7800. Dec. 17 at 8.)

MOVIES
OPENING

ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS
Tim Hill directed this comedy, blending animation and live action, starring Jason Lee as David Seville and Ross Bagdasarian, Jr., as the voice of Alvin. Opening Dec. 14. (In wide release.)

I AM LEGEND
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 14. (In wide release.)

THE KITE RUNNER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 14. (IFC Center.)

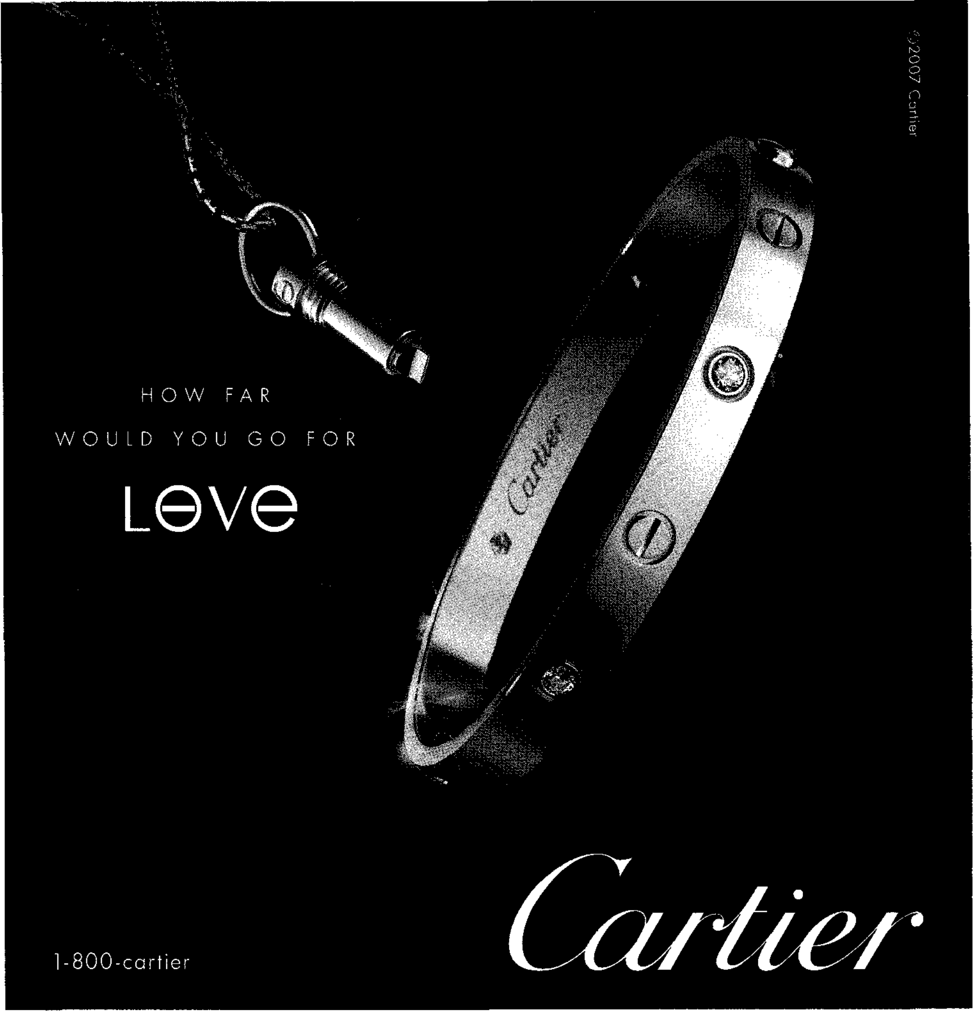
LOOK
A drama of intertwined urban stories, all filmed through surveillance cameras. Directed by Adam Rifkin. Opening Dec. 14. (Angelika Film Center.)

NANKING
A documentary by Bill Guttentag and Dan Sturman, about the "Rape of Nanking" by the Japanese Army in 1937-38. Opening Dec. 12. (Film Forum.)

THE PERFECT HOLIDAY
A romantic comedy about a divorced mother (Gabrielle Union) who meets a man who works as a shopping-mall Santa (Morris Chestnut). Narrated and produced by Queen Latifah; directed by Lance Rivera. Opening Dec. 12. (In wide release.)

THE SINGING REVOLUTION
James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty directed this documentary, about the role of music in the liberation of Estonia. Opening Dec. 14. (Village East Cinemas.)

JASHAR AWAN



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A familiar brand, known to a generation of *New Yorker* readers, Warm Things today also has four retail stores in the Bay Area.

For more information, visit warmthingsonline.com or call 415.472.2154

A WALK INTO THE SEA: DANNY WILLIAMS AND THE WARHOL FACTORY
A documentary, directed by Esther Robinson, about the disappearance of Williams, a member of Warhol's circle and the director's uncle. Opening Dec. 14. (Cinema Village.)

YOUTH WITHOUT YOUTH
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 14. (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

ATONEMENT
A very British affair, not just in its personnel—the director Joe Wright and the screenwriter Christopher Hampton serve up a loyal adaptation of Ian McEwan's novel—but in its obsession with the upheavals of the Second World War and with the minor, eternal skirmishes over social class. In 1935, a bright girl named Briony Tallis (Saoirse Ronan) intervenes in—and thus, unwittingly, all but destroys—a passionate rapport between her sister Cecilia (Keira Knightley) and Robbie (James McAvoy), the housekeeper's son. The movie's middle section finds Robbie serving in France during the chaotic retreat from Dunkirk in 1940 while his beloved waits in London and Briony (now played by Romola Garai) ponders her childhood crime. Wright handles the loops and leaps of time with deftness and clarity, and the film, brimming with sensual detail, certainly honors McEwan's depiction of one hot, cruel day that unfolded into a lifetime of guilt and expiation; but clever books have a troubling habit of coming across, onscreen, as too clever by half, and, somewhere in the labyrinth of its construction, this love story loses its heart. With a wonderful turn, late in the day, by Vanessa Redgrave, as the final incarnation of Briony.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/10/07.) (In wide release.)

THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY
In 1995, Jean-Dominique Bauby, the editor of French *Elle*, suffered, at the age of forty-three, a massive stroke that left him able to move nothing but his left eye. The little book that Bauby composed by blinking while a secretary ran through the alphabet serves as the basis for this astounding movie, which was directed by Julian Schnabel and written by Ronald Harwood. At first, we see only what Bauby (Mathieu Amalric) sees: a blur of faces, which turn out to be the doctors and nurses at the hospital, who float into view in fearsome closeup, like deep-sea monsters. Consciousness arrives, and we experience the discomforts of Bauby's treatment. But then, by degrees, the movie opens up to the great world: Bauby's life and past, his fantasies and dreams. The associations are wild and free, yet nothing feels arbitrary or showy (one thinks of the visionary episodes in silent films rather than of Fellini). We need this free-flowing beauty; we deserve it; the movie, in the end, is an overwhelming sensual experience. With Emmanuelle Seigner, Olatz Lopez Garmendia, and Marie-Josée Croze. Magnificent cinematography by Janusz Kaminski. In French.—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

ENCHANTED
Disney fights back. After years of seeing its animated features outclassed by the competition—not least from Pixar, now its own subsidiary—the company has realized that its strength lies in plundering its back catalogue and making sport with the spoils. Hence Kevin Lima's new film, which starts in a cartoon kingdom (an unabashed homage to early Disney, exploding with anthropomorphism) and suddenly spirits its main characters into the real world—or, at any rate, into a New York where people sing on cue, and where a divorce lawyer (Patrick Dempsey) can discover his inner warmth. So, not that real. But the conceit is smartly wrought, so much so that the attempts at comic relief (from a C.G.I. chipmunk and a henchman played by Timothy Spall) seem not just lumpen but superfluous. Happily, the leads carry the day: James Marsden as a prince of grinning vanity, Susan Sarandon as the wicked stepmother (although the climax turns her into something else, again unnecessarily), and, above all, Amy Adams, who, in the role of a would-be princess, finds true momentum, not just sappiness, in the farce of innocence. With songs by Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

THE GOLDEN COMPASS
An earnest and unsatisfying adaptation of the first book in Philip Pullman's best-selling young-adult fantasy trilogy, "His Dark Materials." The adventure takes place in a land where people's souls manifest themselves as animals and the sinister government of the Magisterium wants to rule the world. The story involves a young orphan girl (Dakota Blue Richards) who, with the aid of a magic compass, sets out to find two friends who have been kidnapped by the Magisterium. At the same time, she is befriended by a glamorous world traveller (Nicole Kidman), who promises to help her on her quest but has her own agenda. The movie, directed by Chris Weitz, is stuffed with subplots and characters (talking animals, witches, and water gypsies) who all have a story to tell, and the narrative becomes so busy that the plot gets lost. With its soaring Roman structures, vehicles out of Jules Verne, and Dickensian Cockney dialogue, Weitz gets the look and the feel right, but the magic stops there. And the unresolved ending is a huge problem, particularly if the audience hasn't been told that the film is basically a setup for things to come.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

I AM LEGEND
In 1973, when "Day of the Dolphin" opened, Pauline Kael wrote that it was "the most expensive Rin Tin Tin picture ever made." Alas, this is no longer true. Will Smith's movie cost two hundred million dollars, and he spends almost the entire two hours talking to his German shepherd. Man and dog are apparently the only fully human and fully canine survivors after an anti-cancer serum has killed everyone else in the world except for some rabid humanoids and devil dogs. The digitized shots of an empty New York, with grass sprouting between the cracks in the pavement, are intriguing to look at, but the rest of the movie is a violent retread of older last-man-on-earth films with Vincent Price, Charlton Heston, and Don Johnson. The religious will be relieved to know that God is explicitly not responsible for eliminating the earth's population. The villain is science. Directed by a badly overmatched Francis Lawrence.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

JUNO
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

THE MIST
It takes nerve, and a certain style, for the director of "The Shawshank Redemption" to make a horror film in which almost nothing is redeemable, but that is what Frank Darabont has done. A small town in Maine is invaded by thick mist, under cover of which lurk misshapen creatures—the outcome, we vaguely learn, of wayward military experiments. As if determined to stock up on groceries, they lay siege to a supermarket, where a crowd of locals has found refuge. These include some reassuringly familiar types, such as the heroic pragmatist (Thomas Jane), the consoling schoolteacher (Laurie Holden), the finger-pointing nutcase (Marcia Gay Harden), and the skeptic (Andre Braugher) who refuses to believe in giant, writhing flesh-eaters right up to the moment at which he meets them socially. The result, adapted from a story by Stephen King, is well paced, and blood is shed in careful moderation, but do not be fooled by the anguish of the climax: this is the true, B-movie mixture of shocks and silliness, and is all the better for it.—*A.L.* (11/26/07) (In wide release.)

NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN
The latest movie by the Coen brothers is adapted from Cormac McCarthy's novel of the same name. Javier Bardem, his menace half-masked by a comical haircut, plays a calm, unstoppable psychopath

on the trail of a stolen two million dollars. (His presence is both frightening and entertaining, if never wholly credible.) Various unfortunates cross his path and suffer the consequences, but his principal target is Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin), a passing hunter who took the money. Following them both is Sheriff Bell (Tommy Lee Jones), who seems in no particular hurry, and whose ruminations on crimes past and present committed in this desolate part of Texas are spoken in a gravelly voice-over. The movie, photographed by Roger Deakins, is almost stately in its ominous control, drawing us into the minutiae of mayhem and revenge. What other filmmakers would devote an extended scene to the stashing of booty in a ventilation shaft? The result is oddly unemotional, as if a vicious game were being played by solemn rules, with barely a flicker of interest in the characters' moral plight. Only Kelly Macdonald, in her beautifully judged (and accented) performance as Moss's wife, begins to restore the balance. With Woody Harrelson.—*A.L.* (11/12/07) (In wide release.)

LE PONT DES ARTS

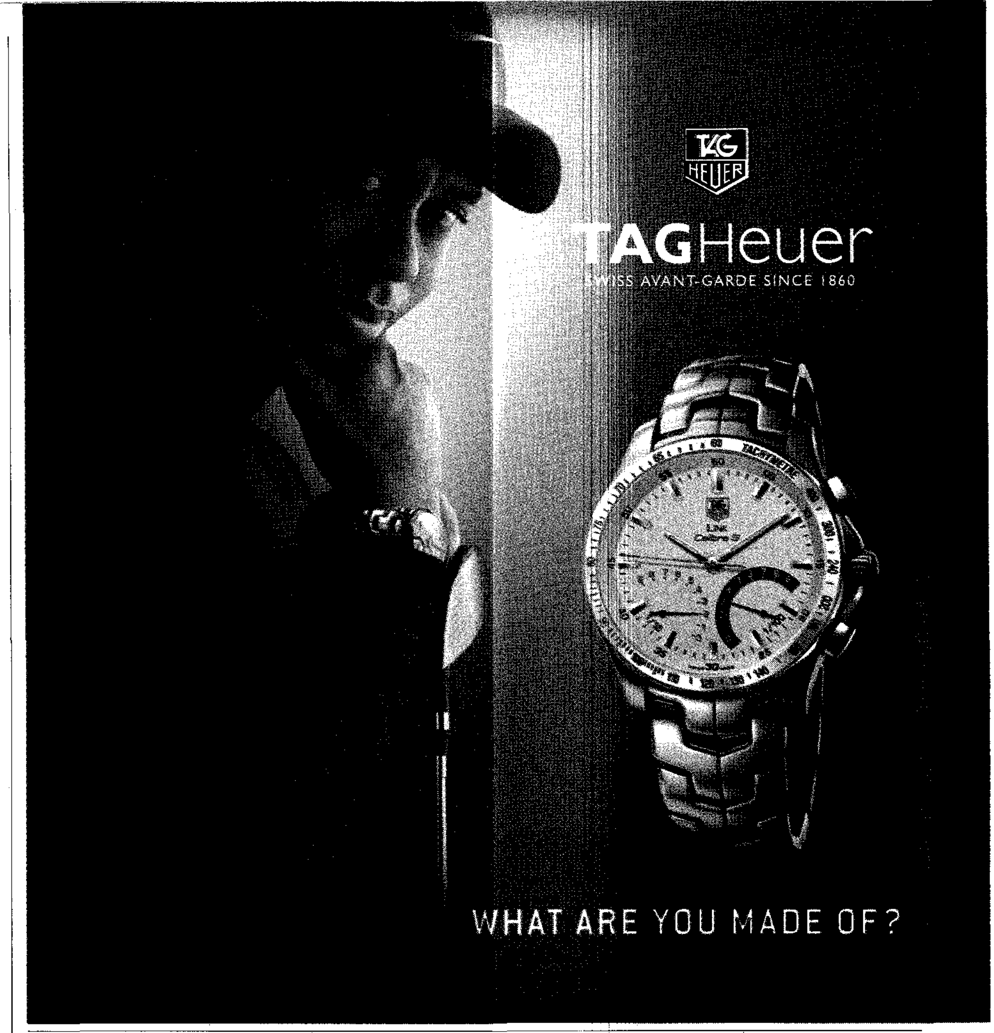
In Paris in the early nineteen-eighties, two young couples cross paths: a poetic dilettante and his pedantic girlfriend and a singer in a Baroque ensemble and her computer-programmer boyfriend. In the course of exam preparations and Christmas festivities, the mismatches are corrected through the intervention of a higher power—music itself. Eugène Green, an American in France, has made a stylized romance in defense of Europe's cultural heritage, and its real hero is the seventeenth-century composer Claudio Monteverdi, whose plaintive airs Green endows with a madly outsized force—including the ability to revive the dead. The film is full of grand gestures and deadpan humor, including what is likely the finest scene of Noh theatre yet filmed in France. Green's script is truffled with cosmic aphorisms that the lovers declaim and that a villainous conductor named the Unnamable (the great character actor Denis Podalydès) spews forth with wicked glee. Yet for all of the film's involuted antics, Green has serious things in mind: if love and other fine feelings are possible in a world of oppressive practicalities, he suggests, it is only through great art and its social counterpart, the gratifying artifices of convention. In French.—*Richard Brody* (French Institute Alliance Française; Dec. 18.)

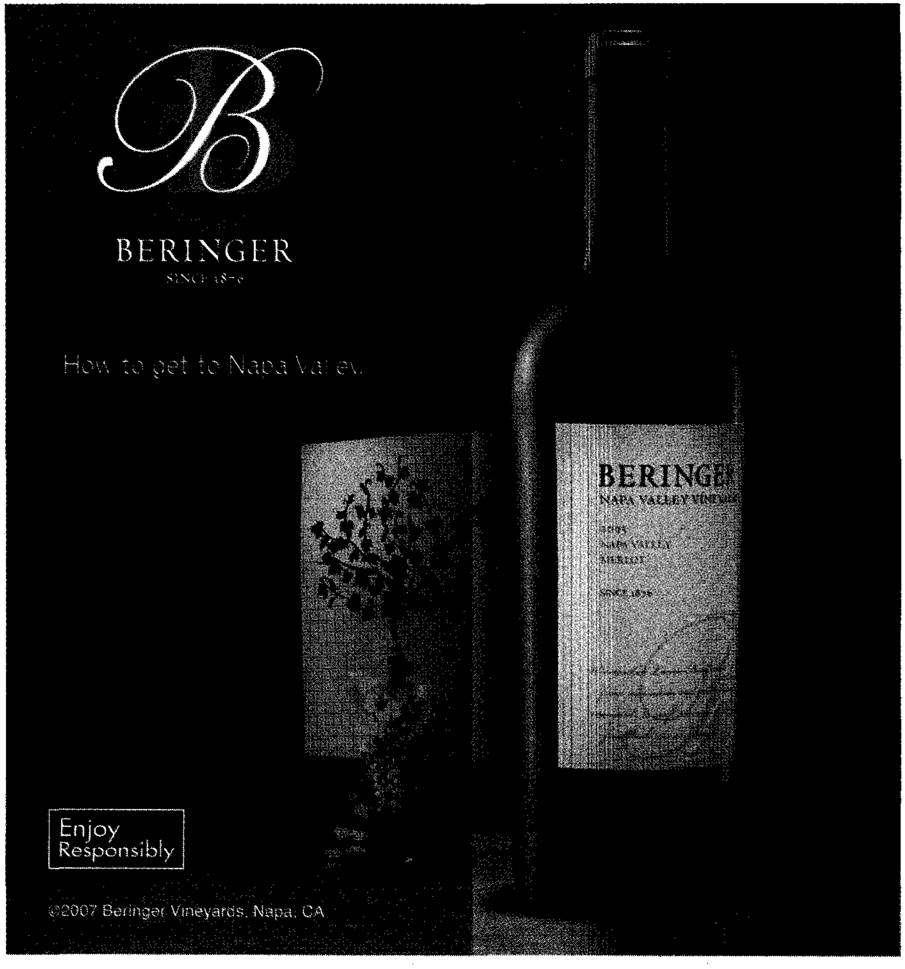
THE RECKLESS MOMENT

A responsible mother (Joan Bennett), trying to be the man of the house while her husband is overseas, takes extreme measures to protect her daughter (Geraldine Brooks) from being connected to the accidental death of the girl's sleazy lover (Shepperd Strudwick). Max Ophüls (credited as Opuls), shooting on location in Los Angeles and in a quaint seaside town fifty miles away, fleshes out this unusual 1949 domestic film noir with a sort of heightened quotidian detail—as Ophüls's camera glides through the woman's house, you feel you know it better than you do your own. And James Mason is essential in the nonsensical role of a sensitive, caring blackmailer. He helps Ophüls spin the soap-opera elements of the story into wonderfully ironic romantic melodrama: a suburban fairy tale in which a dark knight helps the heroine slay her dragons but no one looks as if he or she will live happily ever after. Remade in 2001 as "The Deep End."—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; Dec. 14.)

THE SAVAGES

A vital, honest, and engaging movie about two fortyish siblings who have never grown up. Philip Seymour Hoffman plays a saturnine literature professor who specializes in the most acidulous of twentieth-century artists, Bertolt Brecht, and Laura Linney is his kid sister, an unproduced playwright who gets by working temp jobs, stealing from office supply rooms, and hustling for grants. Unresolved in everything that matters, brother and sister, to their chagrin, find themselves in charge of their nasty and unreachable father (Philip Bosco), who has never given them any love. The movie, however, is less interested in their relation to him than in their cranky elbowing of each other. Written and directed by Tamara Jenkins, "The Savages" asks whether two

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
WEST SIDE STORY

Woody Allen never met a neurotic woman character he didn't like, but, of all his self-conscious and uncertain ladies, Dianne Wiest, as a would-be actress, singer, and writer in "Hannah and Her Sisters" (1986), screening in a new print at Film Forum Dec. 14-24, is probably the most heartbreaking. The movie is one of Allen's richly photographed love letters to upper-bourgeois New York; it's not as incisive as "Annie Hall" and "Manhattan," but Allen weaves together the complex narrative strands with ease, punctuating the many variations on betrayal and love with three festive Thanksgiving dinners (filmed in Mia Farrow's apartment). Allen himself appears as a TV writer-producer going through a crisis. As he walks around the city searching for meaning in Catholicism and Hare Krishna, Wiest searches in a more practical way—she's looking for a place she can fit in. She can hardly speak without apologizing for herself, and her hesitations, retreats, fresh assertions, and collapses are timed with comic perfection. And her happiness in the end, however conventionally arrived at, is the kind of warming moment that's rare in Allen's work.

—*David Denby*

people who have never been prized can possibly bring themselves to value anyone else or even themselves. The answer is soberly inspiring.—*D.D.* (12/3/07) (In wide release.)

STARTING OUT IN THE EVENING
As Leonard Schiller, an aging, ailing old-school novelist seemingly born in a suit and tie, Frank Langella gives his all in a hopeless cause. This soporific quasi-literary soap opera finds the writer, a lonely widower, clacking away at a novel on a manual typewriter in a prewar Upper West Side palace when Heather Wolfe (Lauren Ambrose, too perky by half), a grad student, turns up. She wants to write a critical biography of Schiller to rehabilitate his name and his work, and she worms her way into his confidence and, unsurprisingly, his bed, with predictably unhappy results. There's also something about his unfulfilled daughter (Lili Taylor) and her relationship problems, but the story runs on Schiller's embattled rectitude and the fantasy that great writers embody a lost gentility of austere habits too sacred to be sullied by mere carnality. In real life, he would have eaten her up by the end of the first reel. Directed by Andrew Wagner.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE WALKER
Paul Schrader's peculiar Washington, D.C., thriller, another installment of his "night worker" films (including "Taxi Driver," which he wrote, and "American Gigolo"), stars Woody Harrelson as Carter Page, a gay man descended from a long line of respected Southern politicos, who spends his days as a companion to wealthy politicians' wives. When his favorite, Lynn (Kristin Scott Thomas), discovers the murder of a lobbyist she is sleeping with, Carter covers for her and becomes implicated in the crime. Though set in the present day (there are vague references to 9/11 and terrorism), the film seems oddly trapped in the past, which, perhaps, allows for the apt rendering of Washington drawing rooms. The film is graced with some wonderful scene-stealing by the regal, beautiful women, especially Scott Thomas and the wise, iconic Lauren Bacall, and by Ned Beatty as a wily Vice-President. Although Harrelson exudes an appealing cheekiness, he lacks the depth or panache to make us feel anything.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

YOUTH WITHOUT YOUTH
The worst thing about Francis Ford Coppola's movie is that it isn't outrageous enough to become camp. A seventy-year-old Romanian linguist and polymath, Dominic (Tim Roth), struck by lightning in 1938, undergoes some sort of regenerative process and recovers the body of his forty-year-old self. Years later, in the mountains, he runs into a pretty girl, Veronica (Alexandra Maria Lara), and damned if she doesn't get struck by lightning, too, at which point she turns into his long-dead paramour, now suddenly granted access to languages and civilizations from eons ago. In the junk movies of the past, women inhabited by someone else's soul spoke in tongues—maybe during sex—but when Laura bursts into Sumerian or Sanskrit, Coppola presents it as a revelation of the eternal return of civilization. The material is based on the work of the distinguished Romanian novelist and religious historian Mircea Eliade, but Eliade's ideas may not be amenable to dramatic treatment, and, in this case, they have been handled with appalling solemnity. People sit around discussing time and language; professors with thick accents deliver opinions on arcane subjects; there's a bald swami with a stick, a cave in India with skulls and parchment that turns to dust. Some of the images and period settings are lovely, but Coppola, once the greatest storyteller in movies, has settled for the kind of unworkably pompous nonsense that most people leave behind in a college bull session. With Bruno Ganz.—*D.D.* (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

Also Playing

AWAKE: In wide release. **BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD:** In wide release. **THE DARJEELING LIMITED:** In wide release. **I'M NOT THERE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. Dec. 12-13 at 7:30: "The Holy Modal Rounders . . . Bound to Lose" (2006, Sam Wainwright Douglas and Paul Lovelace). ♦ The films of Standish Lawder. Dec. 14 at 7: Program 1, short films, including "Raindance" (1972). ♦ Dec. 15 at 5: Program 2, "Standing Room with Standish Lawder and Stanley Cavell" (1973, Robert Gardner). ♦ Dec. 15 at 7: Program 3, short films, including "Necrology" (1968). ♦ Dec. 16 at 5:30: Program 4, short films, including "Corridor" (1970). ♦ Screening in memory of Joseph Saleh. Dec. 14 at 7:30: "Streetwise" (1984, Martin Bell).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Max Ophüls. Dec. 12 at 7: "Caught" (1949). ♦ Dec. 14 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Reckless Moment" (†). ♦ Dec. 15 at 5, 7:15, and 9:30 and Dec. 16 at 3, 5, 7:15, and 9:30: "The Earrings of Madame de . . ." (1953; in French). ♦ Dec. 17 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Trouble with Money" (1936; in Dutch). ♦ Dec. 18 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Exile" (1947). ♦ Special event. Dec. 13 at 7: "Tartuffe" (1926, F. W. Murnau; silent), followed by a book signing with Peter Kobel.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The films of Ousmane Sembene. Dec. 12 at 1:30, 4:30, and 7:30: "Camp de Thiaroye" (1987; Sembene and Thierno Faty Sow; in French and Wolof). ♦ Dec. 13 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Emitai" (1971; in Wolof and French). ♦ In revival. Dec. 14-24 at 1:25, 3:30, 5:35, 7:40, and 9:45: "Hannah and Her Sisters" (1986).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—French musicals. Dec. 18 at 12:30 and 7: "Same Old Song" (1997, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ Dec. 18 at 4: "Le Pont des Arts" (†).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Dec. 12-20 (call for showtimes): "Eraserhead" (1977, David Lynch). ♦ Dec. 14-16 at noon: "Il Posto" (1961, Ermanno Olmi; in Italian).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Dec. 12-14 at 1:30: "Flamingo Road" (1949, Michael Curtiz). ♦ "Collaborations in the Collection." Dec. 12 at 6: "Woyzeck" (1979, Werner Herzog; in German). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Fitzcarraldo" (1982, Herzog; in German). ♦ Dec. 13 at 6:30: "The Docks of New York" (1928, Josef von Sternberg; silent). ♦ Dec. 13 at 8:30: "Jet Pilot" (1957, Sternberg). ♦ Dec. 14 at 6:30 and Dec. 16 at 2: "Scarface" (1932, Howard Hawks). ♦ Dec. 14 at 8:30 and Dec. 15 at 2: "Barbary Coast" (1935, Hawks). ♦ Dec. 15 at 4: "Gunga Din" (1939, George Stevens). ♦ Dec. 15 at 6:30: "Wuthering Heights" (1939, William Wyler). ♦ Dec. 17 at 6: "Morocco" (1930, Sternberg). ♦ Dec. 17 at 8:30: "The Scarlet Empress" (1934, Sternberg). ♦ The films of Giuseppe De Santis. All films are in Italian. Dec. 13 at 6: "Bitter Rice" (1949). ♦ Dec. 13 at 8:30: "A Tragic Hunt" (1946). ♦ Dec. 14 at 6: "Giuseppe De Santis" (2007, Carlo Lizzani). ♦ Dec. 14 at 8: "Rome 11 O'Clock" (1952). ♦ Dec. 15 at 4:30 and Dec. 16 at 3:30: "Days of Glory" (1945, De Santis, Luchino Visconti, et al.). ♦ Dec. 16 at 1: "No Peace Under the Olive Trees" (1950).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Italian-Americans in Film." Dec. 15 at 3: "Golden Boy" (1939, Rouben Mamoulian). ♦ Dec. 15 at 6: "Love with the Proper Stranger" (1963, Robert Mulligan). ♦ Dec. 16 at 4: "Beyond Wiseguys: Italian Americans and the Movies" (2007, Steve Fischler), followed by a discussion with John Turturro, Rosanne De Luca Braun, and the director. ♦ Dec. 16 at 7: "Mac" (1992, John Turturro), introduced by the director.

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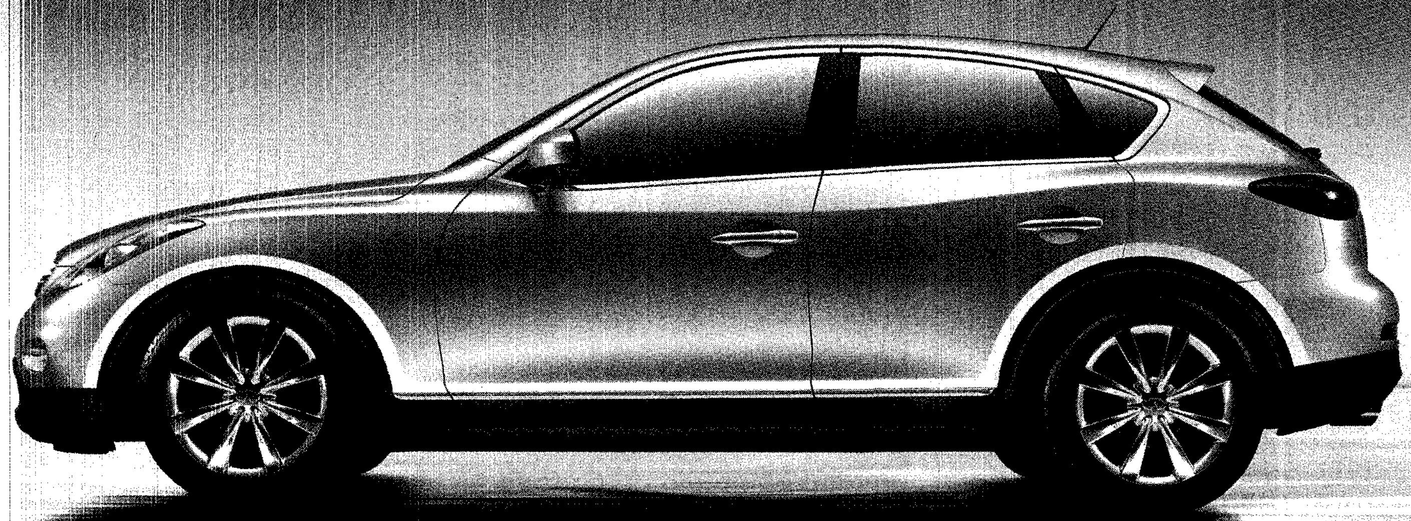

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Dec. 14 at 9:30: "The Burmese Harp" (1956, Kon Ichikawa; in Japanese).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screenings. Dec. 13 at 6:30: "Val Lewton: The Man in the Shadows" (2007, Kent Jones), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Dec. 13 at 9: "I Walked with a Zombie" (1943, Jacques Tourneur), introduced by Jones. ♦ "Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 13 at 7: "The War on Film," a television series about the Spanish Civil War, Program 2. ♦ Dec. 14 at 1, Dec. 15 at 9:15, and Dec. 17 at 5: "Lola" (2007, Miguel Hermoso). ♦ Dec. 14 at 3:10 and Dec. 16 at 1:30: "Contestant" (2007, Rodrigo Cortés).

READINGS AND TALKS

192 BOOKS
The *New Yorker* writer Janet Malcolm offers selections from her latest work, "Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice," a study of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. (192 Tenth Ave., at 21st St. 212-255-4022. Dec. 12 at 7.)

"A TRIBUTE TO GRACE PALEY"
Allan Gurganus, Amy Hempel, A. M. Homes, Galway Kinnell, Naomi Replansky, Lynne Sharon Schwartz, and others turn out to honor the short-story writer, who died earlier this year. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 12 at 7.)

KGB BAR
Ned Vizzini and Joe Weisburg read from their fiction. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 16 at 7.)

THE EXPLORERS CLUB
Phil Brown, the editor of *Adirondack Explorer*, discusses the life of the legendary preservationist Bob Marshall, who died in 1939, at age thirty-eight. (46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383. Dec. 17 at 6:30.)

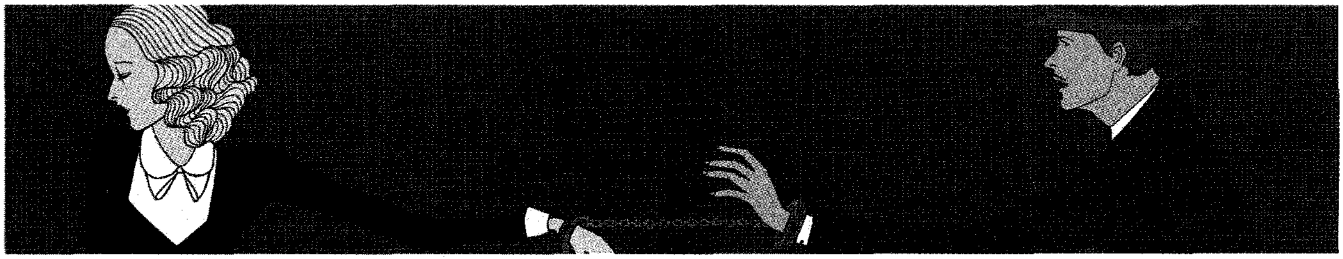
"READING BETWEEN A & B"
The poets Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Anne Waldman, and Jonathan Thirkield read from their work at the Eleventh Street Bar, in the East Village. (510 E. 11th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 17 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"PETER AND THE WOLF"
The Guggenheim's "Works & Process" series presents the Prokofiev classic, narrated by the chatty designer turned TV personality Isaac Mizrahi and performed by the excellent Juilliard Ensemble, with designs by the young artist Andrew Scott Ross. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Dec. 15 at 4, Dec. 16 at 2:30 and 4, and Dec. 17 at 10:30 A.M. and noon.)

CENTRAL PARK CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
In the nineteenth century, there was a popular Christmas activity in America called the side hunt, in which a party would split into two groups and go off hunting. Whichever group brought back more game—birds always being by far the most numerous—was considered the winner. This tradition troubled an ornithologist named Frank Chapman, and in 1900 he instituted what he hoped would become a new ritual, a Christmas bird count. Twenty-seven like-minded souls across North America engaged in the first count that year. Expect a slightly larger turnout in Central Park on Dec. 16. (For more information, call 212-691-7483.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The end of the year approaches, but don't put away your paddle just yet: the foundational document of Western civil liberties as we know them is up for sale at **Sotheby's**—seriously. On the evening of Dec. 18, an original manuscript of the Magna Carta, the seed of the British constitution and one of some twenty such manuscripts extant in the world, will go on the block, to benefit the charitable activities of the Perot Foundation. The auction is preceded earlier in the day by a sale of Israeli art (with multiple works by Reuven Rubin and Mordecai Ardon). On Dec. 14, the house will hold three design auctions, starting off with a single-owner sale of early-twentieth-century German pieces (from the Jugendstil, Werkbund, and Bauhaus schools), continuing with an auction of a private collection of Tiffany lamps, and wrapping up with a general sale of notable prewar design. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** closes out the year with its own trio of design sales (Dec. 18): a morning auction devoted to the creations of Tiffany Studios (including a striking Favrile-glass-and-wrought-iron fire screen with a Gothic chain-mail look); an offering of prewar design; and a sale of a private collection (including Asian art, furniture, carpets, and paintings) of the late Robin Roberts, founder of the upscale textile firm Clarence House. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ On Dec. 13, **Phillips** hosts one of its elegantly eclectic sales of modern and contemporary design, featuring a selection of ceramic works (including two abstract pieces by the mid-twentieth-century German potter Hans Coper) and a wide range of furniture. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)



HIROSHI TANABE

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
LEAP YEAR
Dec. 28-Jan. 1

Walter Reade high-steps it into the New Year with a weekend of the five films directed by Bob Fosse (from "Sweet Charity" to "Star 80") and a clutch of musicals he choreographed, including "My Sister Eileen," from 1955, in which Fosse dances. (212-875-5600.)

THE THEATRE
HITCHCOCK HUMOR
Jan. 4

Roundabout Theatre Company presents "The 39 Steps," a spoof of the Alfred Hitchcock spy thriller from 1935 (which was based on a book by John Buchan), in an adaptation by Patrick Barlow. The comedy, which débuted in London, features a cast of four playing more than a hundred and fifty roles and reënacting every scene in the movie, including the chase on the Flying Scotsman. (212-719-1300.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BUNDLE UP
Jan. 13

It takes guts for a soprano to tackle "Winterreise," Schubert's song cycle about a brokenhearted winter wanderer, which is usually claimed by male singers. But Christine Schäfer has decided to brave it—and she has a glorious voice to match her ambition. She is accompanied by the pianist Eric Schneider at the Rose Theatre. (212-721-6500.)

NIGHT LIFE
REDEMPTION TIME
Jan. 25

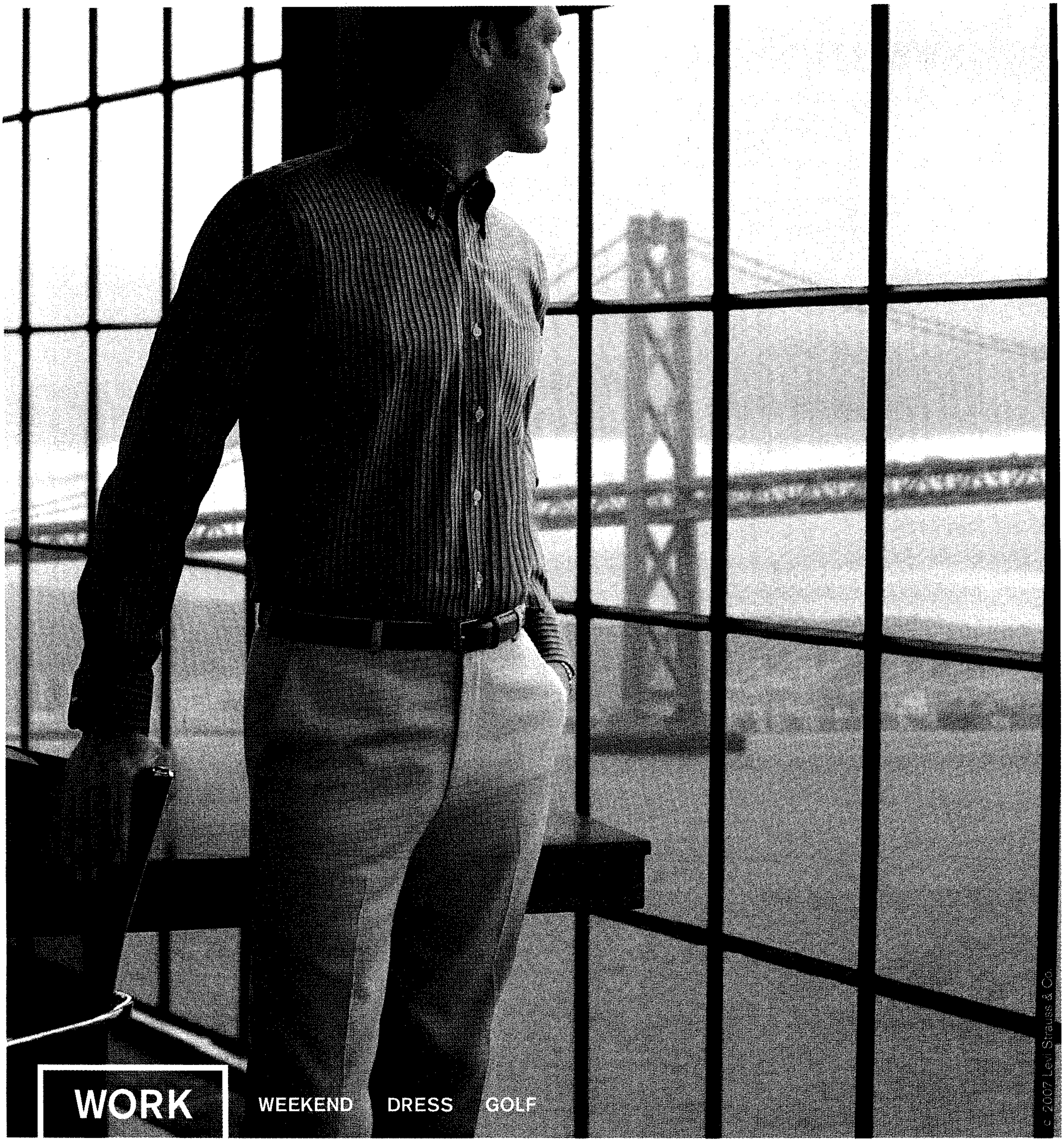
The World Music Institute brings a bit of sweetness to the post-holiday period with its "Gospel Caravan" show, featuring the Blind Boys of Alabama, the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Chuck Campbell Ensemble, and the McIntosh County Shouters, at City Center. (212-545-7536.)

ART
TUSCAN SONS
Jan. 25-April 20

In the sixteenth century, the Medicis commissioned a stellar lineup of Florentine artists to decorate the Palazzo Vecchio. "Michelangelo, Vasari, and Their Contemporaries: Drawings from the Uffizi," a new show at the Morgan Library, will feature some seventy masterpieces related to the project. (212-685-0008.)

Roundabout Theatre Company's "The 39 Steps."

legacy khaki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THE WIZARDRY OF "HEROES" EFFECTS GURU

Amazing audiences with characters who convincingly defy the laws of gravity and physics, "Heroes" depends on a crew of experts, led by special-effects supervisor Gary D'Amico, to conjure magic and make it credible. This is the last in a series of five interviews with the talent behind NBC's top-rated drama.

"Heroes" not only creates its own reality, it creates its own atmosphere. What magic is the special-effects team called upon to conjure?

D'AMICO: We handle all the mechanical effects that appear before the camera: the wind, rain, mist, snow, fire, smoke, steam, explosives, pyrotechnics. It's the manipulation of water and other liquids, including the conveyance of those liquids in whatever form, that makes it look like items move without the aid of human contact.

You also seem to have mastered the voodoo of suspending time. How do you make it appear as if everyone but the key actors is frozen in a scene?

D'AMICO: What convinces people that time freezes is when the director has the actors assume and hold awkward positions. We build "green rigs"—armatures or brackets—for the actors to lean on. The green rigs get deleted in post-production.

In a scene in a Las Vegas casino where we froze time, the waitress had a drink on her tray that looked like it was about to spill. In reality, the drink was hinged. Then Hiro rights the glass. It wasn't filled with a cocktail, but an acrylic we built to look like one.

3.75"
HEROES
SHARP

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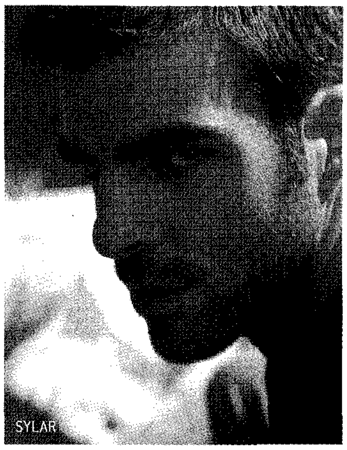
Which effects do you get the biggest kick out of creating?

D'AMICO: The telekinetic gags are great fun. In one episode, Sylar flips over an F.B.I. SWAT van as it's transporting Ted. Sylar waves his hand, and the van flips over wildly. Since Sylar was supposedly moving the van with his mind, there was no explosion—no pyrotechnics, no residual flame and smoke, which you normally see when a vehicle flips. It was tricky because it was a heavy vehicle, not a model. We did it with pneumatics and air pistons.



There's a scene in the Texas diner where a coffee cup moves telekinetically. How can we kids try that at home?

D'AMICO: Easy. Drag ceramic magnets under a table to achieve that effect.

Does knowing that "Heroes" is broadcast in HDTV affect the materials you use?

D'AMICO: You can't get away with doing things that you once did for standard TV. For example, when we make snow, we have a company deliver fifty tons of ice, run it through a chipper, and make actual snow. On a regular TV show, you could cover the foreground in snow foam and the background in Dacron blanket. In HD, it would be obvious that they are different products.

What's your home theater like?

D'AMICO: I've always had good luck with Sharp products. After I looked at and researched all the brands, it still made the most sense. So I have three AQUOS HDTVs at the moment: in my office, in my kitchen at home, and in my daughter's room. And I'm planning to add a fifty-two-inch AQUOS TV to my viewing room.

For extra credit: Do you believe there are humans with special powers?

D'AMICO: Yes. They're called producers.

The next volume of "Heroes" premieres Monday, January 14th, 9–10 P.M. ET on NBC.

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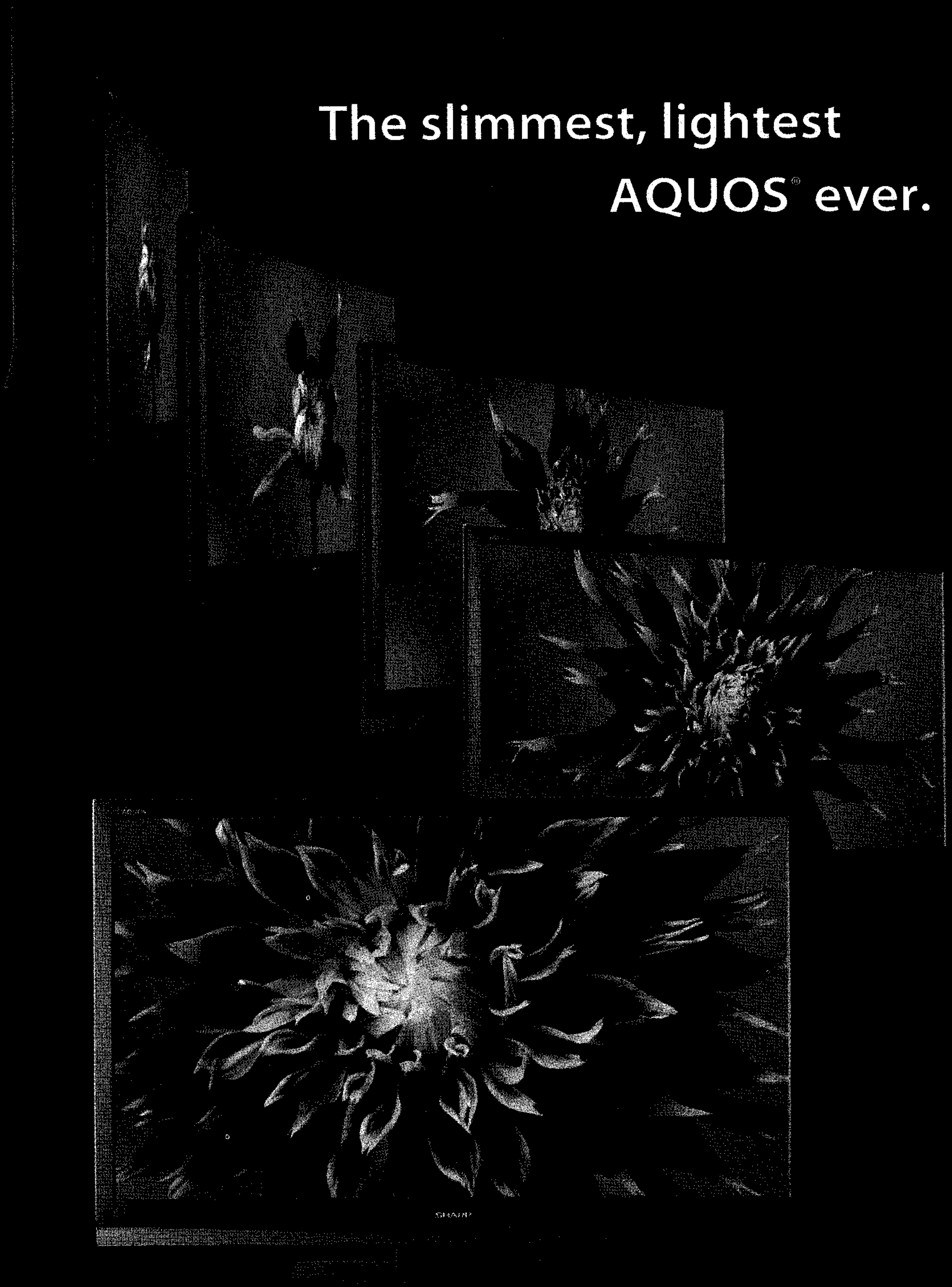

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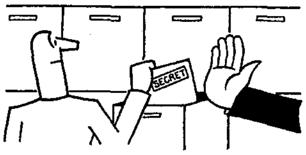
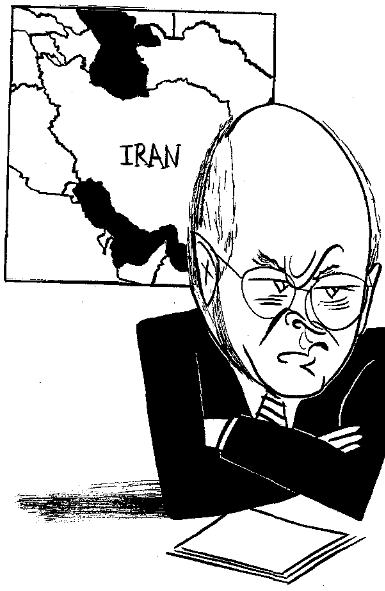


Last week, the Bush Administration released declassified extracts from a new National Intelligence Estimate about Iran's nuclear program. The passages landed in Washington like a religious scroll; they radiated revelation. The N.I.E. drew upon new intelligence, collected last summer, to report with "high confidence" two facts that were previously unknown, or at least heavily disputed: that Iran's Islamic revolutionary government had commissioned a secret, military-run atomic-weapons program, in addition to its open nuclear-power program, and that, in 2003, Iran halted this secret program, "primarily in response to international pressure."

This assessment may yet prove to be no more accurate than past American intelligence evaluations of Iran (the Shah's rule is stable; the Iranian Revolution has reliable moderates; if the United States invades Iraq, Iran will react passively). But, taken at face value, the findings expose some of the bluff, humbug, and extremism that have often dominated nuclear diplomacy between the Bush Administration and Tehran.

Iran's ruling clerics are revealed in the estimate as nervous types. As the mullahs watched the United States recklessly invade Iraq, in 2003, to destroy weapons of mass destruction that no longer existed, they harbored the guilty secret that their atomic-bomb program *did* exist, and might yet be discovered. So they apparently put their bomb work to rest. To a considerable extent, the "international pressure" referred to in the estimate must have been neurotic and self-inflicted: if the mullahs confessed their secret program, they might be goners, but if they did not confess and got caught, they might also be goners. Iran's government seems to have coped with this conundrum in the manner of deceivers throughout history and literature: it blustered, obfuscated, hinted, delayed, negotiated for some way out, but ultimately found itself imprisoned by its own deceit. More pragmatically, it launched a clandestine campaign against the American forces occupying Iraq, to forestall a possible American invasion.



The estimate's findings provide equally bracing clarity about the Bush Administration: they show that the Cheney regency persists, and that the Vice-President and his neoconservative protégés in the Administration have continued to exaggerate and misuse intelligence to advance preconceived policies—in this case, a policy of militant confrontation with Iran, salted by public misstatements of what was known or knowable about the Iranian nuclear threat. A year ago, in these pages, Seymour Hersh reported that the C.I.A. had acquired intelligence that Iran's nuclear program was considerably less advanced than the White House advertised, but that this reporting had been dismissed by Cheney and his aides, who wanted only intelligence that would allow them "to accomplish the mission," as a senior intelligence official told Hersh. The official's choice of words resonates still.

During a news conference last week, President Bush said that he didn't learn the new facts about Iran's bomb program until late November, several months after the discoveries were made. Dana Perino, the White House press secretary, later corrected this assertion, saying that Bush had been told the gist of the new information last summer, but not the details. This puzzling chronology may be explained by the President's lassitude, or by his desire to deflect attention from how much he knew and when, or by the reluctance of his spy services to deliver unwel-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

come intelligence, however provisional, to the Cheney-prowled White House.

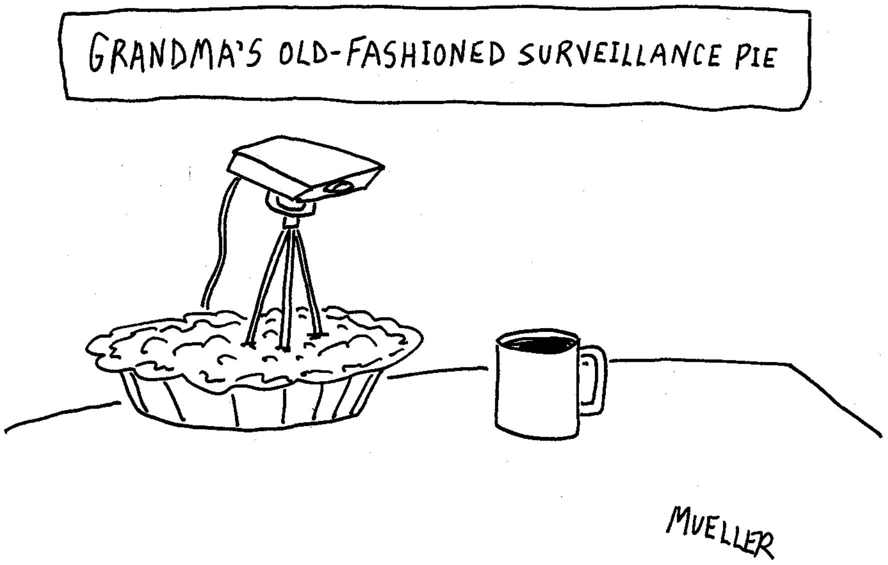
The new intelligence offers an implied but compelling case for sustained diplomatic engagement with Iran, because it reveals that country's ambivalence about its nuclear ambitions. In any event, there is no other plausible way to pursue the urgent objective of Iran's nuclear disarmament. As the Administration's recent progress in negotiations with North Korea has shown, it is hard to predict when an opaque, radical government might be ready to bargain seriously about its nuclear hole card. The only way to find out is to stay at the table. (At this point, the risks of an unsuccessful diplomatic initiative scarcely seem worth worrying about: the world's capacity to absorb American foreign-policy failures is apparently elastic.)

By now, more than sixty years into the atomic age, there is little mystery about why or how countries sometimes agree to give up work on nuclear weapons. Moral vision is not a decisive factor, the evidence suggests; the leaders who have repudiated bomb programs span the considerable range between Muammar Qaddafi and Nelson Mandela. Nor does the nature of a country's political system seem to matter much. According to Richard Rhodes's recent history "Arsenals of Folly," the countries that, since the bombing of Nagasaki, have forsworn, under diplomatic pressure, either bomb arsenals or advanced-weapons experiments include, in addition to Libya and South Africa, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Australia, Norway, Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, Turkey, Greece, Romania, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Switzerland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

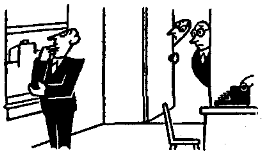
Nuclear bombs are expensive, dangerous, and not very useful in war, but they do bring prestige and scare off unruly neighbors. While each diplomatic case is as individual as a fingerprint, the formula for achieving voluntary nuclear disarmament is well established: a country's anxieties about security are negotiated into quietude; its aspirations to political legitimacy and economic integration are rewarded; and, if the government in question is nonetheless recalcitrant, political and economic pressure are brought to bear. This method is not infallible, but the global scorecard since 1945 is not entirely discouraging: about two dozen successes; three failures (India, Pakistan, Israel); five problem arsenals born in the Cold War and complicated by Great Power competition (the United States, Russia, China, France, and Britain); and two cases-in-progress, North Korea and Iran. In only one instance, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, has preëmptive military action, rather than diplomacy, figured significantly in an attempt to stop nuclear proliferation; as a test case of this approach, beginning with Israel's raid on an Iraqi reactor in 1981 and culminating with the present war, it has proved less than persuasive. In an earlier era, the Cuban missile crisis was similarly uninspiring.

The case of Iran's bomb program—controlled by a messianic government led by a Holocaust denier and operating within missile range of Israel and Europe—presents a distinct problem in atomic history. Iran's possession of the notionally peaceful nuclear fuel cycle it seeks might well provide an unreliable regime with an unacceptable reserve-bomb capacity. These tactical and negotiating problems are daunting, but their prominence in the current discourse is a diversion from a deeper fallacy in the Bush Administration's approach to the nuclear danger. The Administration, trapped by its ahistorical skepticism about diplomacy, manages nuclear negotiations as merely an extension of regional-power contests. The challenge posed by atomic bombs, however, has always been global and moral. The engagements that will matter most, after Bush and Cheney have at last departed, will be not only with Iran and North Korea but with the neglected goal of worldwide nuclear-arsenal reductions, negotiated in full embrace of the ideal of abolition.

—Steve Coll



PINSTRIPES DEPT.
DIAL-A-RABBI



Rabbi Stuart Shiff, one of six New York rabbis employed by Aish HaTorah, a nonprofit Jewish-education organization, carries two pieces of equipment: a BlackBerry and a book of the Torah. Weekdays, he treks to businesses around the city on behalf of Aish's Executive Learning Program—for a voluntary donation (average: ten thousand dollars), bosses who are too busy to go to shul can have a rabbi meet them at the office. "Studying the Torah took my mind off the stress," Lisa Shalett, the C.E.O. of Sanford Bernstein, says in an Aish brochure.

"What this program does is it blows away all the excuses," Shiff explained recently, in one of Aish's conference rooms in midtown. "We have almost a postal carrier's motto: nothing stops us." It was 9:30 A.M. on the day before Hanukkah, and Shiff—who was wearing a black velvet yarmulke—had a meeting with Seth Horowitz, the former chief executive of Everlast, the boxing-supply company (which he had just sold for a reported hundred and sixty-eight million dollars). Horowitz, who is thirty-one, started studying with Shiff eighteen months ago.

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"I just needed to talk to someone," he said, turning off his iPhone. "I've gained so much knowledge. This is the beauty of the program—the rabbi comes to your office, you discuss the Torah, and you talk about life."

They had been reading Genesis 37, where Jacob arrives with his sons in Canaan. " 'Jacob settled in the land of his father's sojournings,' " Shiff read. "Now, there's an interesting extrapolation in the rabbinic commentary. It says *va-yeshev*—that Jacob wanted to dwell. The extrapolation is that he wanted to have a life of ease. He didn't want to have pressure or issues." Then disaster happens: Joseph, Jacob's favorite son, is sold as a slave into Egypt. "It's a very strange thing here," Shiff said. "All Jacob wanted was some peace and quiet. What's so wrong with that?"

Horowitz leaned back in a swivel chair. "It's kind of the opposite of what we're here for? Free will? Our opportunity to choose between good and bad?"

Shiff's exegesis abounded with business-world metaphors: in prison in Egypt, Joseph mistakenly puts "all his trust in his network," but he later rises to become "like the vice-president" of a company. Shiff had an appointment at eleven, at Bear Stearns. He arrived in a cluttered corner office where an executive in pinstripes was yelling into a telephone. A secretary sat nearby. She explained that although she was not Jewish, she enjoyed listening in on Shiff's weekly visits. "I love everything about the Jewish faith," she said. "I think it has a lot of wisdom." The executive hung up the phone. "Basically, I'm a quasi disbeliever," he explained. "I like talking to the rabbi, because I challenge him on a lot of the stuff. I like to ask my questions, which are mostly about the rigidity of religious beliefs. I'm probably his worst patient, if you want to call me a patient."

"Maybe we can talk a little bit about Hanukkah," Shiff said.

"O.K.," the executive said. "Seven candles?"

"Eight! We light eight candles to commemorate a miracle. What's the miracle we're commemorating?"

"I don't know."

"They found oil in a temple that was desecrated by the Syrian-Greek army," Shiff began. He got as far as the eight days, and the executive interrupted. "Where did they get the idea in the first place? That's my question—who wrote the book?"

"The Maccabees," Shiff said. "It's history."

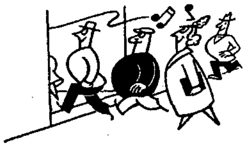
"Yeah," the executive said. "History I can buy." They discussed the Jewish calendar (it's both lunar and solar), and got around to Hanukkah presents. "I didn't have them when I grew up," the executive said. "I don't think you should have them."

Shiff said, "It's probably better that way."

When the session was over, Shiff got on the No. 6 train and headed uptown, to meet his twelve-thirty—a neuroscientist at Mount Sinai who was looking to the Kabbalah to illuminate his findings on postpartum depression. (At his last session, the client had become fascinated by the decree, in Genesis, that "in sorrow thou shalt bear forth children.") "We go everywhere," Shiff said on the train. "We go to J. P. Morgan, Bear, Bloomberg, Goldman—and everybody is so different. It's not about conforming to anything. That last guy, I think sometimes he thinks he's not living up to my expectations of him. But I don't have any expectations. My whole job is helping him to stay connected. We like questions."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

THE BOARDS
PLAYLIST



Everyone has a music life, or a life in music. Rufus Sewell's goes something like this: "Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers, Elvis, Beatles, Stones, David Bowie, Crass, Killing Joke, Elvis again, bebop, never country and Western, except as a joke." Sewell is the star of the Tom Stoppard play "Rock 'n' Roll," at the Jacobs Theatre, on Broadway, in which the music-life playlist, very distinctly Stoppard's, goes more like "Bob Dylan, Stones, Plastic People of the Universe, Velvet Underground, Pink Floyd, Grateful Dead, Beach Boys, U2, the Cure, Stones again." Rock music, and especially the flameout of Syd Barrett, the former leader of Pink Floyd, serves as a kind of metaphor for Marxism, and, each night, between scenes, the Jacobs fills with a hale sampling. It's a soundtrack that Sewell—as Jan, a Czech at Cambridge who returns to Prague in 1968, after the Russian intervention, and, in the next two decades, endures the disintegration of both his idealism and his record collection—has himself endured hundreds of times. "I thought, regarding the music in the play that I already liked—the Stones, the Velvet Underground—I'm going to really hate this before long," he said last week, the morning after a two-show Wednesday. "That hasn't happened. I can be damn sure, though, that this music has now been completely fused to this time period in my life."

Sewell is forty, English, handsome, garrulous, and profane. To the American moviegoer, he may be familiar from costume dramas—his first and most persistent pigeonholing problem, in a career that (he feels, at least) is full of them. If he were a pop act, he'd have several acclaimed albums, a few unnoticed ones, in styles diverging from the earlier ones, and, weirdly, no recording contract. (Having resolved to be picky, he has no current film commitments.)

In Sewell's career arc, the Astaire overture recalls his father, Bill, who died when Rufus was ten. Bill Sewell, an animator, employed an impressionistic approach to Rotoscoping—the technique of tracing over film negatives—in his own film "Half in Love with Fred Astaire" and then in the famous "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" sequence in "Yellow Submarine." Bill Sewell also bestowed on his son an early familiarity with the ways of Bohemia (both big and little "B"): the English animation business, post-'68, absorbed "an influx of bewildered, talented Czechs," Sewell recalled—"scruffy, beer-drinking, roll-up-smoking, very droll old Czech fuckers."

At fourteen, Rufus entered a Bowie phase, which has been unabating. "At the time, David Bowie felt like my own little secret," he said. "My brother called me the Fat White Duke. I dyed my hair—blond in the front, orangey on top. I was an early adopter of 'bad haircut.' I was really into 'David Live.' 1974. Bowie was absolutely drug-fucked. That's when he was living on peppers and milk."

His interest in American music was limited to early funk and groove. "I got into early Stevie Wonder, like, massively,"

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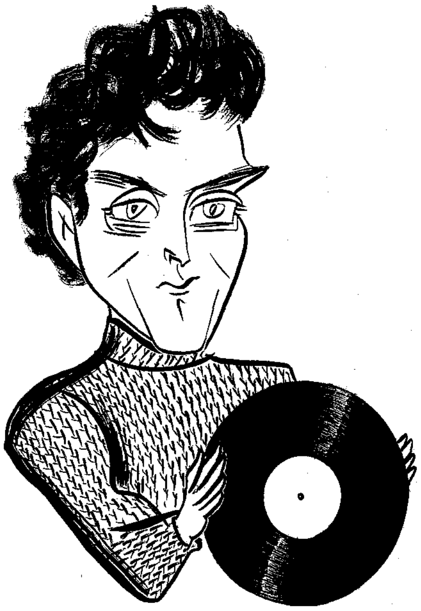
he said. "Really early Stevie Wevie, as we used to call him: 'Fulfillingness' First Finale,' 'Talking Book.' I used to play a little bit of boogie and funk piano. I always played drums in bands. As a drummer, I'm a really proficient thirteen-year-old."

Though the time and place were ripe, Sewell skipped the Clash. "I went really hardcore really quickly," he said. "Suddenly, I was into Killing Joke and Crass"—a pair of British anarcho-punk bands. "I wasn't quite sure if I thought they were really good or absolutely shit. The decision has since been taken. The trick was, as soon as you discovered someone, you'd disparage them as not being good anymore. I did that with Adam Ant."

"The music that defines a period, the music that evokes memories, is not the music you loved," Sewell said. "It's the music that you treated as background. It's the music I neglected—the semi-light, detested and ignored music—that brings me back in a flash. Everything else you take with you. If I hear 'Tainted Love,' by Soft Cell, it's a quite good track, really, but it absolutely—bang, I'm back there." Fourteen again.



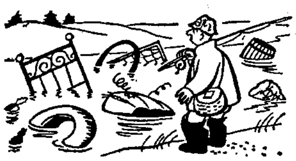
Rufus Sewell

Sewell went on, "To me, Pink Floyd has the very strong whiff of bong smoke still. I actually was listening to 'Dark Side of the Moon' a few years back, and almost had a panic attack, a sort of flashback to being stoned, because it was so reminiscent of being in certain rooms on beanbags." Sixteen.

—Nick Paumgarten

WATERWAYS DEPT.

FIXER-UPPER



"Not every water body can support a bathing situation," a representative of the state Department of Environmental Conservation said last week, in a classic instance of bureaucratic understatement. He was speaking at a forum dedicated to the future of the Gowanus Canal, in Brooklyn, a mile-and-a-half-long shipping channel best known for its odor situation (sewage, with a hint of sulfur), and for the occasional floating cat or rat. New development is planned for the Gowanus watershed, and a crowd had packed the Belarussian church on Atlantic Avenue to discuss the environmental implications. "We have gone through 'Lavender Lake,' when our canal not only smelled but glowed in the dark," Joan Millman, a state assemblywoman, said. "Still does!" a man in the audience called out.

Harbor buffs will tell you that Brooklyn's first export was oysters—gigantic, plate-size oysters—discovered by the Dutch in the marshy creek that became the Gowanus. By the nineteen-seventies, however, it was official government policy to dump chlorine in the canal as a sanitary stopgap, and today the state classifies the Gowanus water as SD—the lowest of five grade levels, meaning that fish might be expected to exist but not propagate. Officials at the forum said that they are hoping to raise the Gowanus's quality, at a cost of about a hundred and forty million dollars, to Class I, so that it will join merely filthy waterways such as the Harlem River and Coney Island Creek.

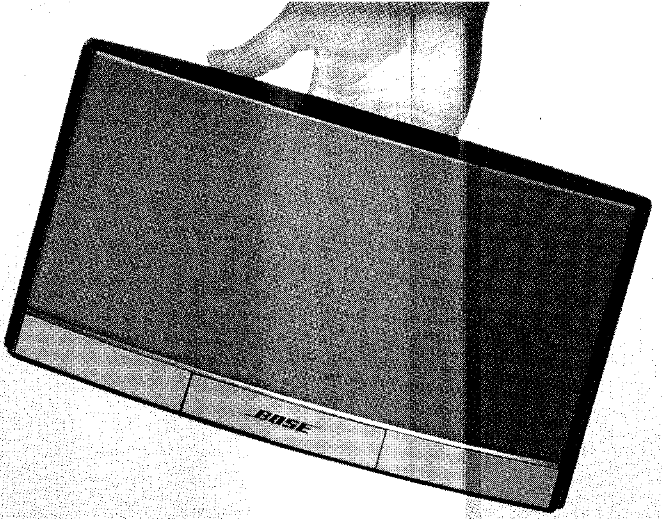
"How is it that we're only wishing to go from—excuse my French—shit to piss?" a man with dreadlocks asked. He was Ludger Balan, the executive director of the Urban Divers Estuary Conservancy, and one of three living humans known to have swum in the Gowanus voluntarily. Balan said that he was motivated when, about a decade ago, he spotted a school of striped bass "screaming for air" near the Carroll Street Bridge. Wearing a suit of vulcanized rubber, he has dived in the canal approximately thirty times since. At the end of the forum, he positioned himself about a foot or two from the nearest wall, stared ahead, and said, "Usually in the Gowanus, this is as much as you can see." (He has also likened the experience to visiting the moon.)

During Balan's diving span, the Gowanus estuary has welcomed and said goodbye to Cap'n Dennis Lynch, who lived on a stained-glass-laden houseboat; Gowanda, a baby harp seal; and Sludgy, a twelve-foot Minke whale. Sludgy's stay was the shortest, and his departure the most final. (A poster board at the church showed two headlines: "Minke Whale Spotted in the Gowanus Bay, Tuesday, April 17, 2007," and "Juvenile Minke Whale Dies, Wednesday, April 18, 2007.") Of the roughly two hundred fish species thought to inhabit the city's harbor, seventeen have wandered into the Gowanus long enough to be discovered by Balan's group; they include flounders, toadfish, and blue-claw crabs. Scientists have also identified twenty-one types of bacteria, including traces of gonorrhea.

"This is the most fascinating thing," Balan said, pointing at a poster showing photographs of microbial colonies growing on the canal sediment. "There is zero oxygen down there, so they're anaerobic, but they're thriving. These are things that are brewing and stewing at the bottom. You have to imagine, like, in the past few hundred years we've developed quite a few chemical compounds." Among the chemicals found in the canal are sulfur, cyanide, asbestos, and PCBs. "And those things are reacting," he said.

One of the handouts available proposed "coating the canal's floor with a clay-type sealant known as AquaBlok," which would presumably take care of the microbial colonies. Much of the discussion, meanwhile, concerned improvements that will need to be made to the flushing tunnel that connects the canal's northern terminus with Buttermilk Channel, to the west—where, earlier this year, another kind of urban diver, Duke Riley, launched a Revolutionary War-era replica submarine and staged a mock invasion of the Queen Mary 2, attracting the attention of the U.S. Coast Guard and the N.Y.P.D. (The front page of the next day's *Post:* "SUB MORON.") The wooden submarine and a video installation of the dive are now on exhibit at a gallery in Chelsea.

—Ben McGrath



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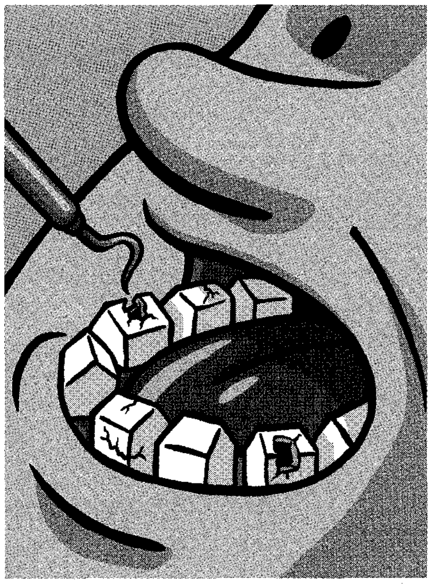
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
PAULSON'S PLAN

In late October, 1907, the American financial system appeared to be on the verge of collapse. The trouble had begun with a seemingly minor event—a failed attempt at stock-market speculation by a bank owner named F. A. Heinze—but it spread quickly after news of Heinze's losses prompted a run on his banks by worried depositors. In a matter of days, financial institutions with connections to Heinze were facing similar withdrawal frenzies, and the stock market was falling precipitously. Amid the turmoil, the financier J. P. Morgan stepped in. Consulting with the Treasury Department, which committed millions in deposits to weak banks, Morgan browbeat bankers into bailing out struggling institutions, funnelled money to cash-starved brokers, and even convinced clergymen in New York City to dedicate their Sunday sermons to the need for "calmness and confidence." Within a few weeks, the fear and chaos had subsided, and the "panic of 1907" left only a small dent in the U.S. economy.

A hundred years later, in the midst of what you might call the panic of 2007, many investors are hoping that a Morgan-style rescue plan will have similarly beneficial effects. The plan, which was unveiled last Thursday, after weeks of orchestration by Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, seeks to stabilize the chaotic subprime-loan market by freezing the interest rates of some borrowers. Although Paulson works for the government, his scheme involves no action by the state. Instead, he has relied, much as Morgan did, on collective suasion, assembling representatives of the many parties involved—mortgage lenders and servicers, investors who bought mortgage bonds, and borrowers—and pushing them toward a solution that, in theory, will leave the economy better off.

The plan targets a looming crisis. Many subprime mortgages came with so-called teaser rates—interest rates that start out low but quickly reset to become significantly higher. Many of those loans—more than three hundred and fifty billion dollars' worth, in fact—are going to reset next year. That means that hundreds of thousands of people who are currently able to pay their mortgages are about to see their payments rise by hundreds of dollars a month. If the credit and housing markets were more buoyant, these people might be able to refinance their loans or sell their homes. But the sharp decline in housing prices and the tightening of credit standards has closed off those options for most subprime borrowers, which pretty much guarantees a big increase in the number of foreclosures. The Paulson plan is meant to buy borrowers—and, arguably, the economy—some time, by postponing the interest-rate resets for five years.

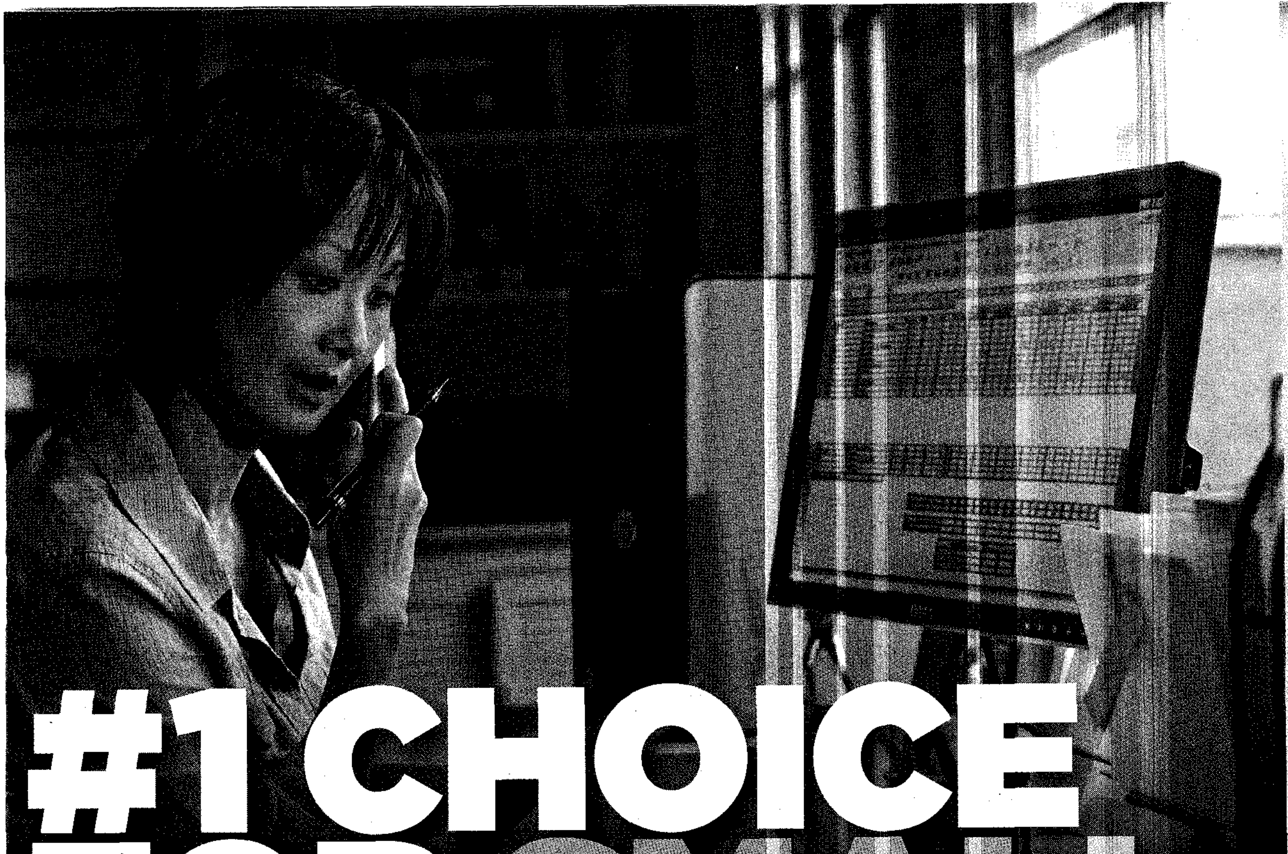
Not for everyone, though. The plan sets up a system of triage, separating borrowers into three categories: those who will be able to keep paying after the rates reset, or else refinance their loans; those who can pay now but won't be able to when the rates go higher; and those for whom even the current rates are too high. Only the second group will get help. Also, the plan doesn't go into effect until next year—if your loan resets on December 31st, you're out of luck.



In theory, this solution is one that lenders could have arrived at on their own. Lenders often lose less money on a renegotiated loan than on a foreclosure, so they should be well equipped to triage bad loans, separating the workable from the truly hopeless cases. So why did the government need to get involved? One reason is that so many loans are going bad that the companies servicing them don't have the people or the skills to evaluate them on a case-by-case basis. (A recent study found, for instance, that mortgage servicers renegotiated only one per cent of loans that reset in the first part of this year.) And, because most of these loans have been packaged into securities and sold to outside investors, the process of renegotiating mortgages is now far more complicated than just talking to the loan officer at your local bank. Paulson's plan streamlines and simplifies the process by creating rough-and-ready definitions of creditworthiness. The Treasury Department's sponsorship also permits a degree of collusion that might normally be considered illegal—banks aren't typically allowed to work together to set loan prices. And it reduces, although it certainly doesn't eliminate, the risk that the investors who actually own these mortgages will sue to prevent the wholesale renegotiation of the loans they own. It's a powerful example of the way government can shape markets without ever passing a law or a new regulation.

Unfortunately, it's also an example of the limits of such intervention. Although the plan will provide real relief for at least some homeowners, it's more like a Band-Aid than like the major surgery that some of the hype makes out. That's because at this point interest-rate resets are just a small part of the mortgage-market problem. Postponing rate resets doesn't change the fact that too many people spent far too much borrowed money on houses with prices that were far too high, and that they are now stuck in homes that they can't really afford and can't sell. Even with the interest-rate freeze, foreclosures will keep rising. More important, problems in the credit markets are no longer limited to subprime loans; rather, they involve a wholesale reëvaluation of risk, fuelled by a deep sense of distrust in the way the financial system rates and values assets like mortgages. For these problems, there's only so much that even the government can do. In 1907, J. P. Morgan was able to come to the rescue not just because he could get all the people who mattered into one room but because he was facing a clear problem with a clear solution. Those were the days.

—*James Surowiecki*



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THE POLITICAL SCENE

RETURN OF THE NATIVIST

Behind the Republicans' anti-immigration frenzy.

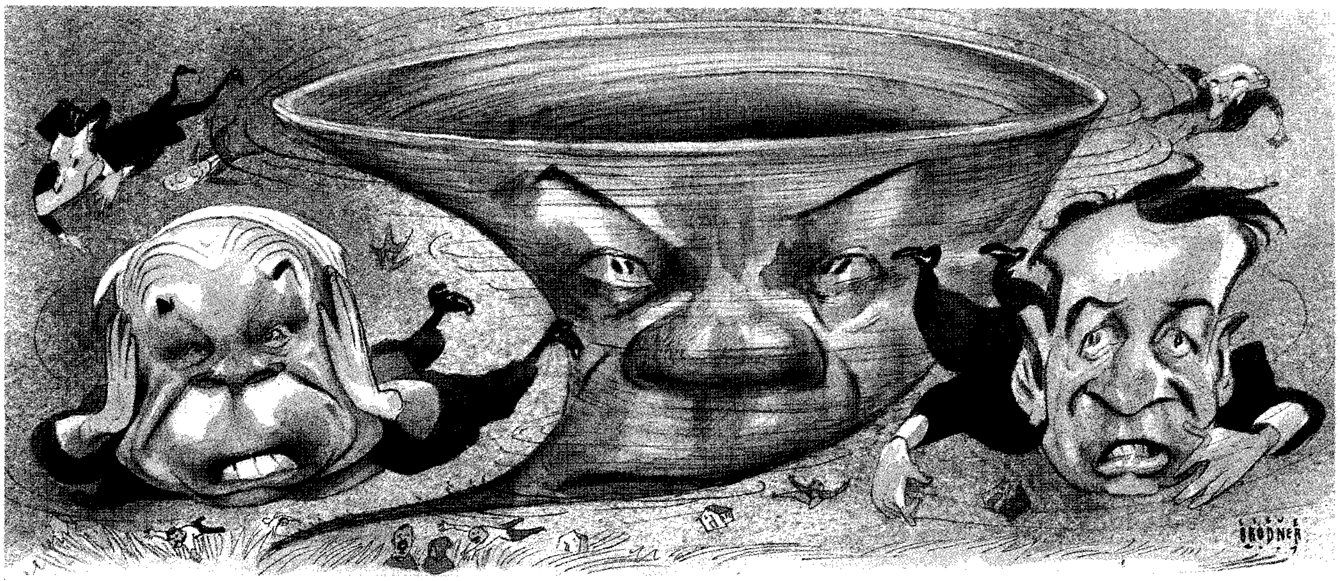
BY RYAN LIZZA

Once upon a time, John McCain was favored to win the Republican nomination. His straight-talking appeal and his cultivation of the Republican Party's right wing put him first—at least in the early conventional wisdom. Then, last summer, his campaign seemed to spontaneously combust in a puff of fund-raising troubles and staff intrigue. But McCain has slowly made his way back into contention. The usual line is that he has done it by being "the old McCain," the one that New Hampshire voters (and many journalists) fell for during his 2000 Presidential run. Unlike Mitt Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, or Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor, two of his chief competitors, he holds a press conference after nearly every campaign event. Just before a recent trip to South Carolina, he invited a dozen reporters for lunch at his Arlington, Virginia, campaign headquarters (on the thirteenth floor, naturally).

Rather than trying to woo religious conservatives, an awkward alliance at best, McCain is focussing more on his natural base of independents (in New Hampshire) and veterans (in South Carolina). Instead of trying to run a by-the-numbers conservative campaign, he is emphasizing issues on which he has taken what he believes to be principled but unpopular positions. He is the only one in the Republican field who seems eager to talk about Iraq. "My friends, here's the news," he told a small crowd in Seneca, South Carolina, a few days after returning from Thanksgiving with the troops. "We are winning in Iraq. We are winning in Iraq. We are winning in Iraq."

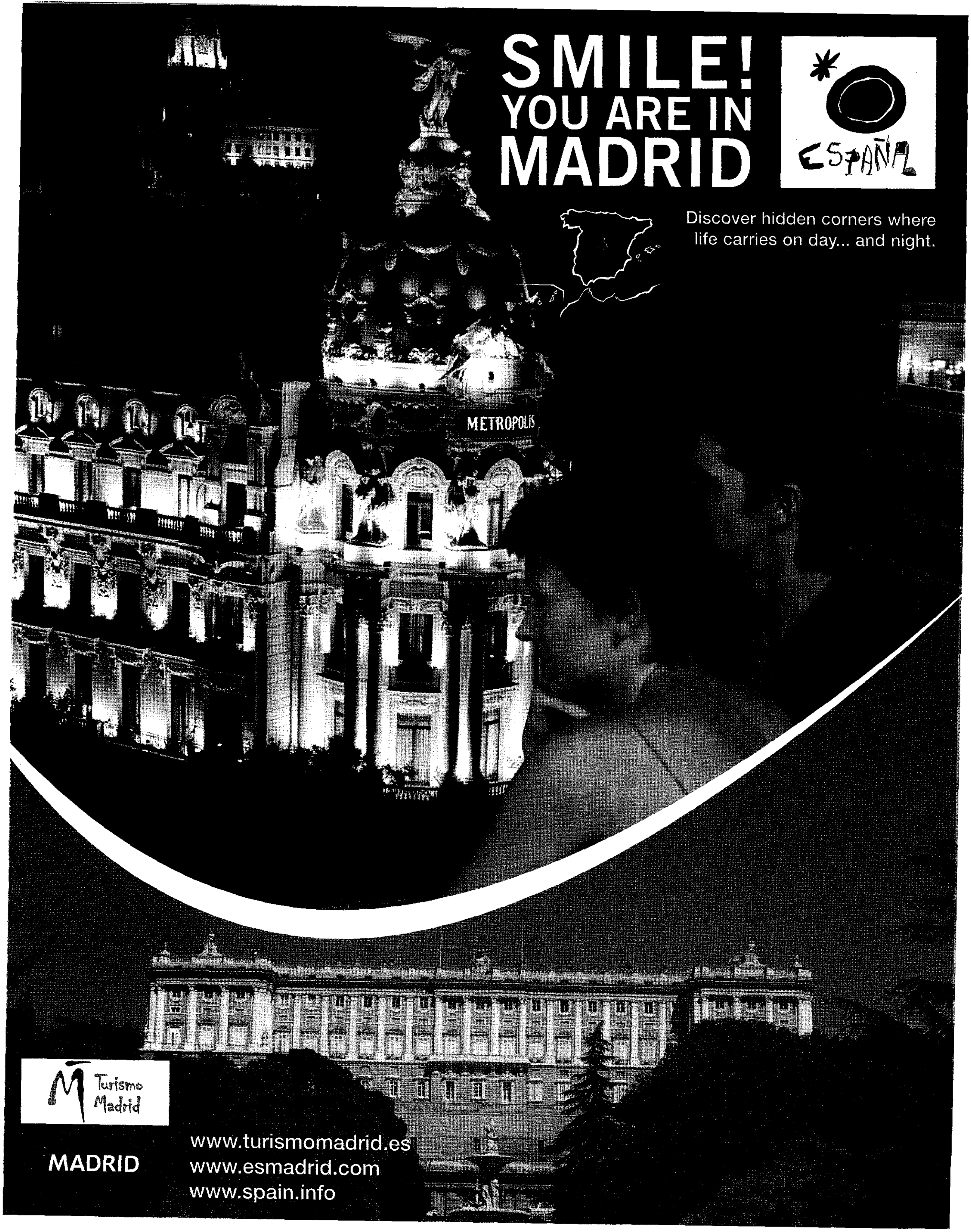
Over lunch in Arlington, McCain had given the stock explanation for what caused last summer's difficulties. "The problem, which was my problem, was that our fiscal expectations weren't met by reality," he said—in other words, he couldn't raise enough money. But the next day, as I travelled with McCain around South Carolina, he told me that his campaign's brush with death had less to do with fund-raising than with his role in championing the ambitious immigration-reform bill, supported by the White House, that died in Congress this year. "It wasn't the budgetary problems. That was an inside-the-Beltway thing," he said, referring to press coverage of his campaign's setbacks. McCain gets animated whenever he discusses the immigration issue. After a town-hall meeting in Anderson, South Carolina, he recalled how the Irish were discriminated against in America. As he quoted a placard that hangs on the wall of an aide's office ("Help Wanted—No Irish Need Apply"), he jabbed his finger in the air with such emphasis that he knocked my voice recorder to the ground and erased our conversation. "It was immigration" that hurt his campaign, he said when he continued, after a series of apologies on both sides. "I understand that. I was told by one of the pollsters, 'We see real bleeding.' "

There were two major factions in the immigration debate in Congress. A bipartisan coalition wanted a bill that included tough border-security measures, which everyone favored, as well as more controversial provisions concerning temporary-worker permits for undocumented aliens and a way for them to attain citizenship. Conservatives, led by Tom Tancredo, a Colorado congressman and Presidential candidate, demanded a bill that dealt only with security. McCain seems torn by how to address the issue, and he makes a small but telling concession to the Tancredo faction when he argues that security legislation must indeed come first. "You've got to do what's right, O.K.?" he told me. "But, if you want to succeed, you have to adjust to the American people's desires and priorities."



Tancredoism—a hard line on immigration—is abetted by an absence of Party leadership and by Bush's unpopularity.

STEVE BRODNER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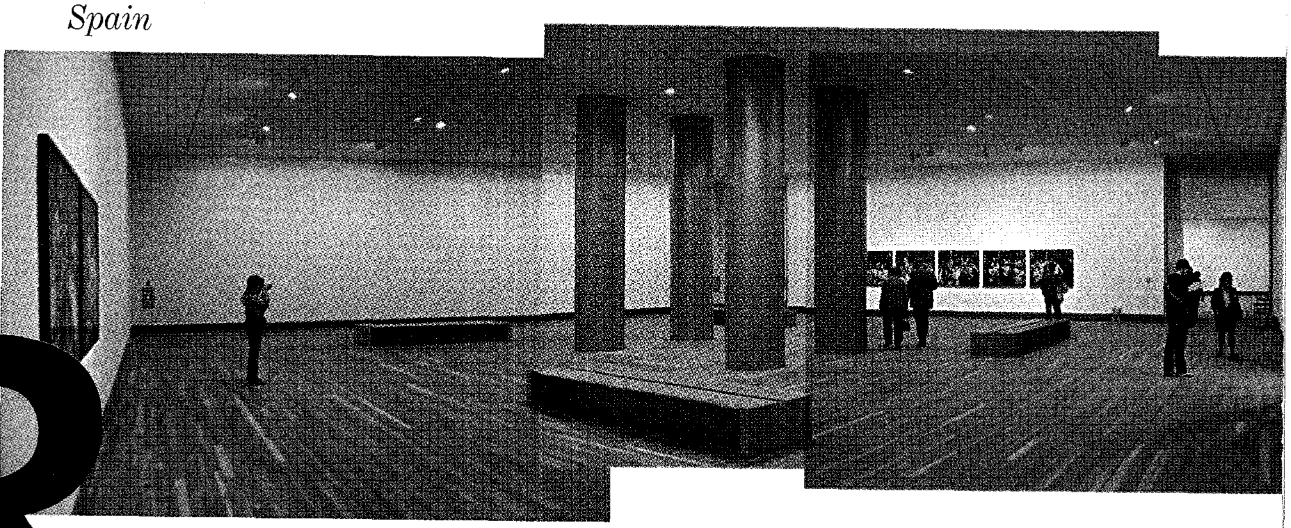

Revel in Madrid

Spain's lively, cosmopolitan capital has a well-earned reputation for offering some of Europe's best night life and cuisine. Revelers from around the world come to celebrate in style at the city's avant-garde dance clubs, intimate bars, chic restaurants, and romantic cafés.

The customary way to kick off an evening is with cocktails and tapas, small dishes of olives, cheese, sausages, and other specialties that sate the appetite before notoriously nocturnal Madrileños eat dinner. Some of Madrid's most popular tapas restaurants are along Calle Cava Baja just south of the Plaza Mayor, where **Taberna Tempranillo** serves these typical treats. **El Bocaíto** in the bohemian Chueca neighborhood is another favorite destination on the tapeo—a multi-stop tapas feast.

After barhopping, friends meet for a leisurely dinner, often not until after 9 P.M. Choosing a restaurant may be one of the tougher decisions of the evening, but a few notable options are **La Broche**, which offers a creative twist on Catalan cooking, **El Amparo**, a Basque favorite, and **Viejo Madrid**, known for its traditional Spanish cuisine.

Besides its vibrant dining scene, Madrid offers a wide range of cultural activities. The prestigious **Teatro Real** hosts concerts and operas throughout the year, and **La Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas**, Madrid's legendary bullring, is also a popular venue for rock concerts and shows.

As dinner winds down and performances end, the citywide party moves into high gear. Crowds gather at clubs around midnight, and everyone dresses up to dance until dawn—locals rarely wear jeans or sneakers to bars and clubs. The grand finale to a night on the town is the typical breakfast ritual: thick, hot chocolate and sweet, fried *churros*.

By day, Madrid has exceptional museums to explore. This fall, the **Prado Museum** unveiled its grand new extension, nearly doubling its size. Designed by architect Rafael Moneo, the enlarged Prado features new galleries and even additional buildings that have been incorporated into the museum, including the restored Cloister of the Jerónimos. The Prado is inaugurating the new space with an exhibition featuring nineteenth-century Spanish artists such as Goya, Madrazo, and Sorolla, on view through April 24th.

Also along the Paseo del Prado, the **Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum** has two of the top private collections of twentieth-century art, with works by Titian, Kandinsky, and Rothko among other museum highlights. Completing Madrid's "Golden Triangle of Art," the **Reina Sofia National Art Museum** specializes in Spanish works—Picasso's "Guernica" is part of the permanent collection. Day or night, visitors can revel in the treasures of this multicultural city.

PHOTOS: NEW EXTENSION OF THE PRADO MUSEUM ©ARQTIPO
WINTER TOMATOES ©TSUKASA SHIMMYO

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During another conversation, when I asked McCain what he had learned from the arguments about immigration, he said, "I think the main lesson is that Americans had no trust or confidence in the government. So when we said, as part of this comprehensive solution, we need to secure the borders, add temporary workers, and address the twelve million people here, they just didn't believe us, O.K.?" He argued that the mismanaged response after Hurricane Katrina, the Washington corruption scandals such as those involving the lobbyist Jack Abramoff, and unchecked government spending had undermined public confidence. "So what you have to do is prove to them that you're going to secure the borders. And then I think that at least most of them—except for the Tancredos, who want to stop all immigration—would say, 'O.K., I'm going to address these other issues.' "

McCain's standard answer to immigration questions is that he "got the message." But every so often this practical McCain, bending to the mood of the primary electorate, gets shoved aside by the quixotic McCain, the one who never seems happier than when he's championing a lost cause. At one stop in South Carolina, at Clemson University, a student engaged McCain in an argument about whether his plan rewarded illegal immigrants for breaking the law. McCain was by then in a combative mood. Minutes earlier, a professor had asked about a piece of Internet-crime legislation that he argued would group terrorism researchers with actual terrorists. "Am I a terrorist?" the professor asked, his querulous tone suggesting that McCain hadn't answered the original question. The questioner was wearing tennis shoes, jeans, a pink polo shirt, and a gray blazer, and McCain looked at him carefully. "With those sneakers, you're not a snappy dresser," McCain replied after a pause, as audience members gasped and laughed. "That doesn't mean you're a terrorist. Though you terrorize the senses." To the student with the immigration question, McCain patiently explained that some illegal immigrants had faced unusual circumstances, and he mentioned a woman who has lived in the United States for decades and has a son and a grandson serving in Iraq. When the student said that he wanted to see punishment meted out to anyone who has broken the law, McCain stopped trying to find common ground. "If you're prepared to send an eighty-year-old grandmother who's been here seventy years back to some country, then frankly you're not quite as compassionate as maybe I am," he said. Next question.

McCain could stop discussing the controversial parts of his immigration plan or he could drop his support for them altogether, admitting that he was simply wrong, as Romney has done with abortion and other issues. I asked McCain about Romney, who had once expressed support for the comprehensive legislation backed by the Bush Administration—it sounded "reasonable," he'd said—but now rails against it as "amnesty." McCain said, "Both he and Rudy had the same position I did. In fact, Rudy was even more liberal. But, look, if that—" He paused and shrugged. "I don't want to be President that bad."

Later that night, at the CNN/YouTube debate in St. Petersburg, Florida, immigration declared itself the dominant and obsessive issue of the Republican primaries, and the issue also clarified some essential differences among the candidates. The two formerly moderate Northeasterners, Romney and Giuliani, taunted each other about who was tougher on illegal immigrants. On the other side were McCain and Mike Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor, who told their opponents that illegal immigrants "need some of our love and compassion" (McCain) and that "we are a better country than to punish children for what their parents did" (Huckabee). The Romney-Giuliani exchange prompted Tancredo, whose platform calls for restrictions even on legal immigration, to giddily declare that his opponents were trying to "out-Tancredo Tancredo."

The emergence of Trancredoism as an ideological touchstone for two Republican front-runners is a stunning development, another indication of the Party's rejection of nearly everything associated with the approach taken by George W. Bush. As a border-state governor, Bush boasted of his relationship with Vicente Fox, who became the President of Mexico, and he and his political adviser Karl Rove later argued that Republicans needed a pro-Latino vision for immigration reform. His strategy of cultivating immigrants as integral to the future of the Party seemed to work, and Bush did surprisingly well with Latino

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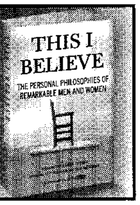

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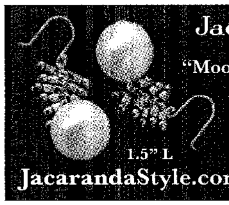

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voters: in 2004, he won some forty per cent of their vote—double what Bob Dole achieved just eight years earlier.

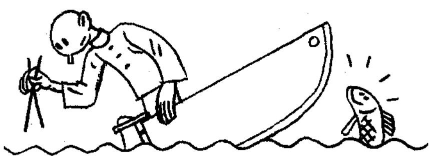
In the late nineteen-nineties, when the Republican Party began embracing Bush's pro-immigrant message, Tom Tancredo was a relatively anonymous backbencher. "When I first started on this, when I came to Congress, nine years ago, I found that I could get few, if anyone, to pay attention to the issue," Tancredo told me as he was being ferried between campaign events in New Hampshire. "I remember going into a Republican conference meeting and asking if I could show a video that a night-vision camera had taken of people coming across the border in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, in Arizona. You had all of these campers parked, people sleeping, and in between were probably hundreds and hundreds of people, most of them carrying guns. And I was showing this and it was two hundred and twenty-two members of the Republican conference, and there were four left at the end of it. And it was a three-minute video. They walked out murmuring things, you know"—he made a mumbling sound—" 'immigration, immigration, immigration.' "

When I asked Tancredo about Bush's argument that Republicans risked losing a generation of Hispanic voters if they adopted an immigration policy that many regard as nativist, he laughed and said, "It doesn't seem to be holding its own very well, considering what happened the other night at the debate. If you think for a moment that Romney, Giuliani, and Thompson"—Fred Thompson, the former Tennessee senator—"haven't polled the heck out of this thing, you're wrong. They have. And they are there now because the polls tell them this is where they should be."

The rise of Tancredoism has been aided and abetted by a number of factors, including an absence of strong leadership in the Republican Party and the greatly diminished power and popularity of the President, whose approval ratings fell as the war in Iraq went wrong and the government failed to act effectively after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. In December, 2005, the nativist wing of the G.O.P. in the House—marginalized by Bush's semi-successful rebranding of his party as progressive on immigration—passed legislation requiring seven hundred miles of fence along the Mexican border, and reclassified as felons illegal immigrants. (The bill set off huge immigrants'-rights protests in dozens of cities in 2006.) The post-Bush, pre-Tancredo era of the Republican Party had begun.

Another catalyst was the peculiar dynamics of this year's Republican Presidential campaign. In 1999, when Bush made his initial foray into Presidential politics, he already had credibility with conservatives, largely based on his tax-cut promises and his religious convictions. It gave him latitude to be heretical on other issues. By contrast, the 2008 Presidential campaign features five leading Republican candidates, each of whom is viewed with suspicion by at least part of the so-called base. Unlike Bush in 1999 and 2000, Romney, Giuliani, Huckabee, McCain, and Thompson have spent most of the campaign trying to establish their bona fides with conservatives. The effect has been to push the field farther to the right, especially on immigration.

Anti-immigrant passion also owes much to the disproportionate influence of a few small states in the nominating process. National polls show that, as an issue, immigration is far behind the Iraq war, terrorism, the economy, and health care as a concern to most Americans; a recent Pew poll shows that, nationally, only six per cent of voters offer immigration as the most important issue facing the country. But in Iowa and South Carolina, two of the three most important early states, it is a top concern for the Republicans who are most likely to vote. "It's the influx of illegals into places where they've never seen a Hispanic influence before," McCain told me. "You probably see more emotion in Iowa than you do in Arizona on this issue. I was in a town in Iowa, and twenty years ago there were no Hispanics in the town. Then a meatpacking facility was opened up. Now twenty per cent of their population is Hispanic. There were senior citizens there who were—'concerned' is not the word. They see this as an assault on their culture, what they view as an impact on what have been their traditions in Iowa, in the small towns in Iowa. So you get questions like 'Why do I have to punch 1 for English?' 'Why can't they speak English?' It's become larger than just the fact that we need to enforce our borders."



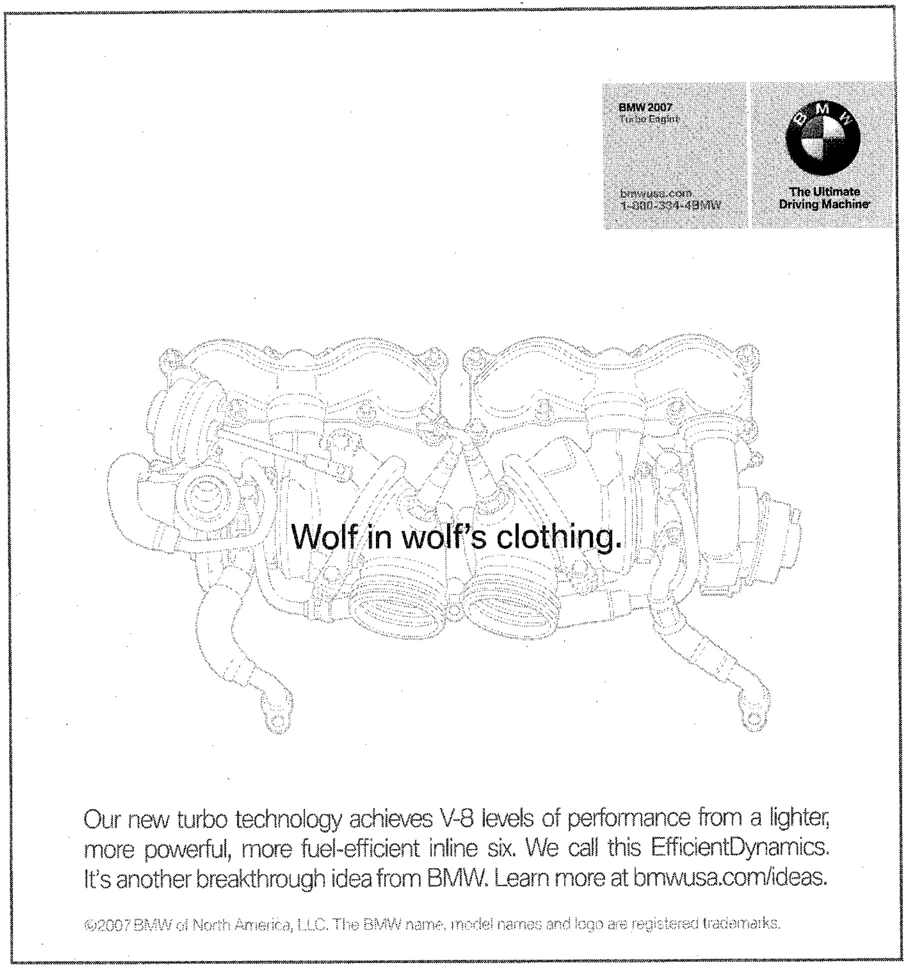
Mike Huckabee is the latest victim of the Republican shift on the immigration issue. We talked on what should have been a happy day for Huckabee. According to at least one poll, he had taken the lead from Romney in Iowa, and was enjoying a sustained burst of positive media coverage. "Oh, man, it's been unbelievable," he said in his winning, Gomer Pyle-like voice. "We're up in New Hampshire and I've got more press coming to the events than I've got people. I'm not kidding. It's unbelievable. We have so many people coming we can't fit them in the places." But Huckabee's excitement was tempered by Romney's persistent attacks on his immigration record as governor of Arkansas, and he seemed to be grappling with the intensity of the question among Republicans. "It does appear to be the issue out here wherever we are," he told me. "Nobody's asked about Iraq—doesn't ever come up. The first question out of the box, everywhere I go—Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida, Texas, it doesn't matter—is immigration. It's just red hot, and I don't fully understand it."

Romney has not been similarly reflective in trying to discern the source of the issue's power. Rather, he has quickly and easily adopted the negative code words of the anti-immigration movement—"sanctuary cities," "amnesty"—and has tried to attach them to Giuliani and Huckabee. In doing so, he became the first top-tier candidate to seize the Tancredo mantle. My own sense, from talking to Huckabee, a Southern populist, and McCain, a border-state senator, is that they are genuinely appalled by Romney's tactics, not only because of the damage to their campaigns but also because of the damage they believe he's doing to the Party's image. Romney's communications director, Matt Rhoades, said, "Both Senator McCain and Governor Huckabee have decided that to win in 2008, Republicans need to be more like the Democrats when it comes to illegal immigration. That's the wrong course. McCain-Kennedy"—Edward Kennedy was a sponsor of the initial legislation—"was the wrong course. Governor Huckabee's plan to give tuition breaks to illegal immigrants was the wrong course. America doesn't need two politicians with records on illegal immigration that are in tune with Senator Clinton."

"He's clearly distorted my record as well as my position," Huckabee told me. "But I'm not interested in getting in a war with him to see which of us can be the meanest son of a gun running for President." He went on, "My experience has been—not just in politics but in any realm of life—when people keep saying something over and over, and louder and louder, it's to compensate that they don't want you to know that's really never what they believed." Nevertheless, last week, Huckabee, too, found his inner Tancredo: he announced the Secure America Plan, which included tough language about enforcement and pressuring illegal immigrants to return home. This leaves McCain as the only Republican candidate who hasn't folded in the face of Romney's attacks. At the press lunch in Virginia, after McCain had discussed his warm relations with several candidates, a reporter asked about Romney. "I've never known him," McCain said icily. "I've never had a relationship with him."

Barack Obama, during a recent interview with the editorial board of the Boston *Globe*, predicted that the Republicans will run next fall on two issues: terrorism and immigration. When I asked a leading Republican strategist and former Bush lieutenant if he agreed, he said merely, "I hope not." He argued that it was incorrect to think that immigration was the second most important challenge facing the United States. "We need to address other issues, like the economy, health care, and education," he said. When I asked Tancredo if he was leading his party "over a cliff" or "to the promised land," he laughed and said, "I see manna out there."

The evidence so far, though, points to a cliff. In several election contests in the past two years, Republicans tried and failed to deploy immigration as a campaign weapon. This November, Republicans in Virginia and New York who ran on the issue were defeated. Not even Eliot Spitzer's misbegotten plan to issue driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, which was thought to be ruinous for Democrats, has damaged the Democratic Party; rather, the Party increased its numbers in local races around the state. McCain says that last year he saw how toothless the issue was in Arizona. "Congressman J. D. Hayworth had a pretty good opponent," he said of the former Republican from Arizona, who lost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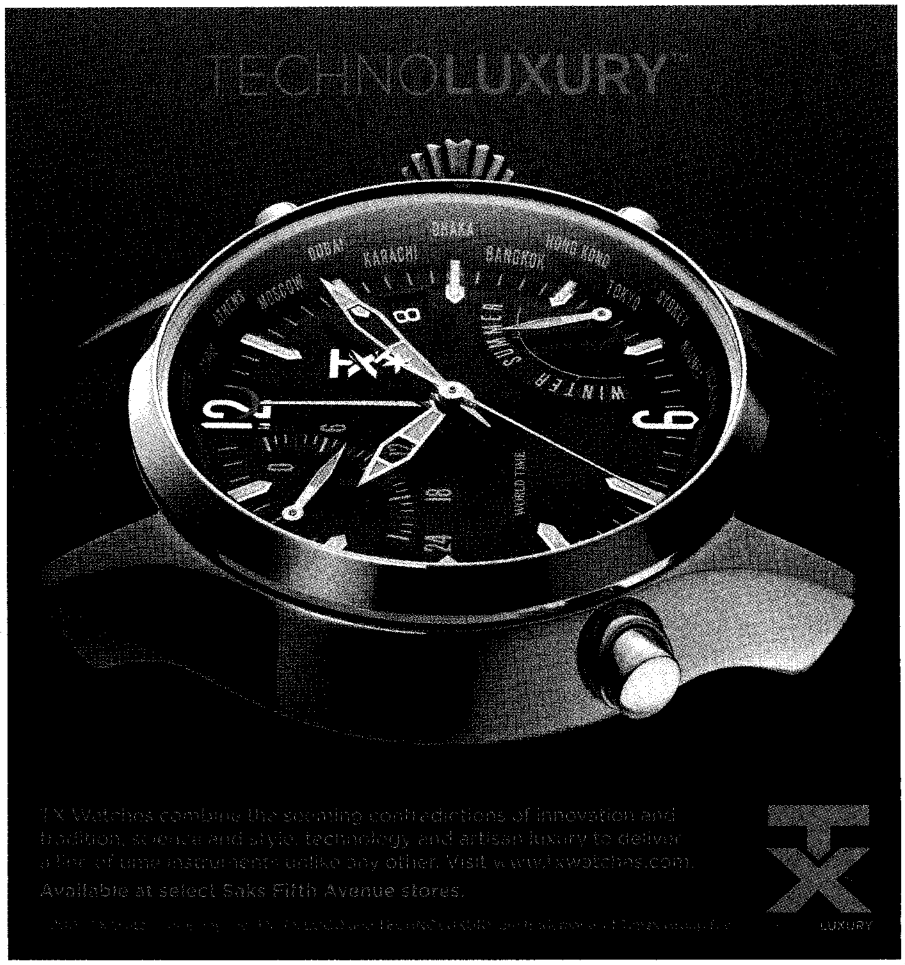

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"Looks like an inside job."

• •

his seat in the 2006 midterm election. "J.D. ran just on the issue of immigration, in a moderate but Republican district. Arizona State University is there, in Phoenix. And J.D. got beat by four points in the general election. There was a guy who was going to take Jim Kolbe's seat"—an Arizona congressman who retired last year. "Jim was there twenty years, and had always carried the district well. The Republican candidate was another one where immigrant, immigration, anti-illegal immigration was his theme. He lost by twelve points. So I think there is a lesson in some of those elections when people use anti-immigration as a major part of their campaign. But I also know that it galvanizes a certain part of the Republican Party."

Far from fearing the immigration issue, some Democratic strategists are quietly cheering how the subject has played out. Simon Rosenberg, a Democratic strategist who has closely studied the politics of the issue, says simply, "The Bush strategy—enlightened on race, smart on immigration, developed in Texas and Florida with Jeb Bush—has been replaced by the Tancredo-Romney strategy, which is demonizing and scapegoating immigrants, and that is a catastrophic event for the Republican Party."

Besides McCain, who was the original Republican sponsor of the comprehensive immigration bill, South Carolina's Lindsey Graham is the Republican most associated with the legislation. Graham negotiated the details of the final version of the bill, which went down to defeat, and as a consequence he has become a target of ridicule on the talk-radio right. On the afternoon of the YouTube debate, Buddy Witherspoon, a Republican National Committeeman, was finishing a two-day tour of South Carolina, announcing his campaign to run against Graham in the June Republican primary. Witherspoon's sole issue is immigration. After watching McCain's testy forum at Clemson, I travelled a hundred and twenty miles to see Witherspoon in Aiken, a town of about thirty thousand. I found him setting up for his speech in front of a government office building at the end of an alley that abutted a shopping thoroughfare where tourists occasionally passed in a horse-and-buggy, casting curious glances. Exactly thirteen people were there to listen to him, including a ten-year-old who had accompanied his grandmother.

Dean Allen, a plump and friendly fellow sporting an American-flag tie, told me that he runs something called Spirit of Liberty; he's also helping Witherspoon's campaign. "Some of these people may be coming in here to get jobs washing dishes, but some of them are coming in here to hijack airplanes," he explained. "If you're down there trying to look at the people coming across the border, maybe a lot of them are just motivated by economics, and they want a job washing dishes or cutting grass. But I can't tell Jose Cuervo from the Al Qaeda operatives by looking at them, because they cut their beard off. It's like trying to get fly manure out of pepper without your glasses on, you know? I mean, not a racist thing, but they're all brown with black hair and they don't speak English and I don't speak Arabic or Spanish, so if they don't belong here and they don't come here legally, I want to know who's here." He echoed McCain's observation that the anti-immigrant feeling is strongest in states with new Hispanic populations. "The illegal Hispanic population, it's definitely growing," he said. "I can tell you just from how many you see when you walk in Wal-Mart, and you drive down the street and you see buildings now with writing in Spanish that says '*tienda*,' which is Mexican for 'store.' You didn't see that even a year or two ago."

After speaking for forty-five minutes, Witherspoon walked across the street with me to Tako Sushi and we sat outside, where heat lamps warmed us. Witherspoon is tall and bald, and he spoke quickly, like a man full of opinions he's been eager to vent. In his speech, he had run through many of the issues that have been festering on the right: the Law of the Sea treaty; an alleged plan to combine Canada, the United States, and Mexico into a super-state; the Patriot Act. But he was most exercised about immigration and about Lindsey Graham's betrayal on that issue. "There's a lot of unrest in South Carolina," he told me gravely. "And people are concerned that the Senator no longer represents the views of mainstream South Carolinians in a lot of ways. Immigration is the No. 1 issue, no question there. We're concerned about illegal immigrants coming in here and—well, under the Bush Administration, it's now seven years into his term, and he hasn't done a lot about it." He was not impressed by Bush's big-tent philosophy of courting Hispanics as the future of the Republican Party. "The big tent is great. But that doesn't mean 'cause it's a big tent you should include everything under the tent."

When I talked to Graham a couple of days later, he did not sound alarmed by the Witherspoon challenge. With more than four million dollars in his campaign account, he can afford to be somewhat, but perhaps not entirely, relaxed. His pollster, Whit Ayres, has been monitoring the issue closely, and Graham was eager to share the results. His role in the immigration debate has indeed hurt him. "What's happened for me is my negatives have gone up about ten points," he told me. "My approval rating has come down about eight or nine points. That's the consequence to me."

But the numbers told another story, too. Graham read me one of the questions that his pollster asked about immigration. The poll tested voters' opinion of three different proposals to deal with illegal immigrants: "arrest and deport"; "allow them to be temporary workers, as long as they have a job"; "fine them and allow them to become citizens only if they learn English and get to the back of the line." In two separate polls, the majority supported the third option. The average for the first option was only twenty-six per cent.

"What it tells me is that the emotion of the twenty-six per cent is real, somewhat understandable, but if not contained could destroy our ability to grow the Party," he said. "And I don't think you need to be a rocket scientist to figure out that if you're going to win a general election you have to do well with Hispanic voters as a Republican." He continued, "My concern is that we're going to have an honest but overly emotional debate about immigration, and we'll say things for the moment, in the primary chase, that will make it very difficult for us to win in November. There's a fine line between being upset about violating the law and appearing to be upset about someone's last name."

Graham, who is one of McCain's staunchest supporters, had not yet seen a new poll by the Pew Hispanic Center, which reported that the gains made among Hispanic voters during the Bush era have now been erased. Nevertheless, he had a warning for Republicans: "Those politicians that are able to craft a message tailored to the moment but understanding of the long-term consequences to the country and to the Party are the ones that are a blessing. And the ones who live for the moment and don't think about long-term consequences, demographic changes, over time have proven to have been more of a liability than an asset." He added, "Be careful of chasing the rabbit down a hole here." ♦

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Ryan Lizza on the Campaign Trail podcast.

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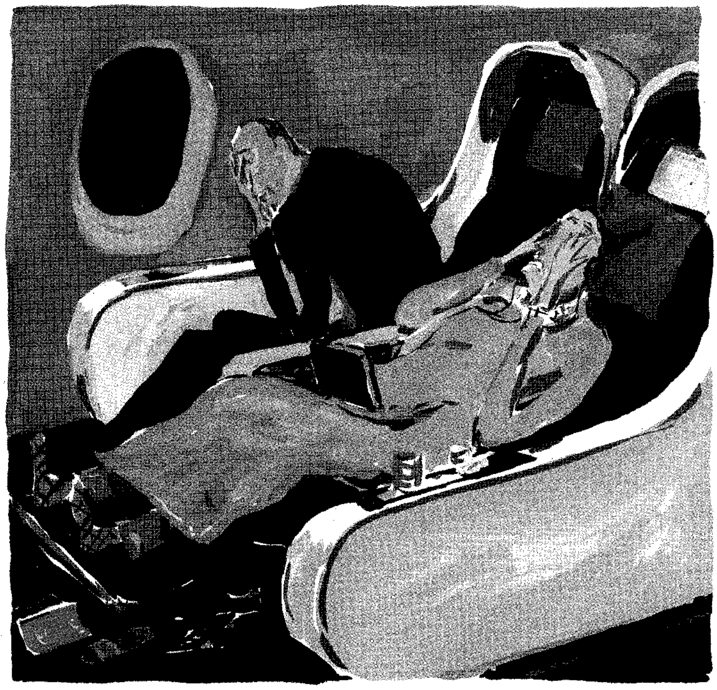
REFLECTIONS

JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Business-class emotions.

BY DAVID SEDARIS

The night flight to Paris leaves J.F.K. at 7 P.M. and arrives at de Gaulle the next day at about 8:45 A.M. French time. Between takeoff and landing, there's a brief parody of an evening: dinner is served, the trays are cleared, and four hours later it's time for breakfast. The idea is to trick the body into believing it has passed a night like any other—that your unsatisfying little nap was actually sleep and now you are rested and deserving of an omelette.



JEAN-PHILIPP DELHOMME

Hoping to make the lie more convincing, many passengers prepare for bed. I'll watch them line up outside the bathroom, some holding toothbrushes, some dressed in slippers or loose-fitting pajama-type outfits. Their slow-footed padding gives the cabin the feel of a hospital ward: the dark aisles, corridors; the flight attendants, nurses. The hospital feeling grows even stronger once you leave coach. Up front, where the seats recline almost flat, like beds, the doted-on passengers lie under their blankets and moan. I've heard, in fact, that the airline staff often refers to the business-class section as "the I.C.U.," because the people there demand such constant attention. They want what their superiors are getting in first class, so they complain incessantly, hoping to get bumped up.

There are only two classes on the airline I normally take between France and the United States—coach and something they call Business Elite. The first time I sat there, I was flown to America and back for a book tour. "Really," I kept insisting, "there's no need." I found the whole "first-to-board" business a little embarrassing, but then they brought me a bowl of hot nuts and I began to soften. Pampering takes some getting used to. A flight attendant addresses me as "Mr. Sedaris," and I feel sorry that she's forced to memorize my name rather than, say, her granddaughter's cell-phone number. On this particular airline, though, they do it in such a way that it seems perfectly natural, or at least it does after a time.

"May I bring you a drink to go with those warm nuts, Mr. Sedaris?" the woman looking after me asked—this as the people in coach were still boarding. The looks they gave me as they passed were the looks I give when the door of a limousine opens. You always expect to see a movie star, or, at the very least, someone better dressed than you, but time and time again it's just a sloppy nobody. Thus the look, which translates to "Fuck you, Sloppy Nobody, for making me turn my head."

On all my subsequent flights, the Business Elite section was a solid unit, but on this particular plane it was divided into two sections: four rows up front and two in the back. The flight attendant assured everyone in my section that although we were technically in the back, we shouldn't *think* of it as the back. We had the same rights and privileges as the passengers *ahead* of us. Yet still they were ahead of us, and I couldn't shake the feeling that they'd been somehow favored.

On the way to New York, I sat beside a bearded Frenchman, who popped a pill shortly after takeoff and was out until we landed. On the leg back, there was no one beside me, at least not for the first half hour. Then a flight attendant knelt in the aisle beside my seat and asked if I might do her a favor—that's how they talk in Business Elite. "I'm wondering, Mr. Sedaris, if you might do me a favor?"

Chipmunk-like, my cheeks packed with warm nuts, I cocked my head.

"I've got a passenger a few rows up and his crying is disturbing the people around him. Do you think it would be O.K. if he moved and sat here?"

The woman was blond and heavily made up. Glasses hung from a chain around her neck, and as she gestured to the empty window seat beside me I got a pleasant whiff of what smelled like oatmeal cookies. "I believe he's Polish," she whispered. "That is to say, I think he's from Poland. The country."

"Is he a child?" I asked, and the flight attendant told me no. "Is he drunk?" It didn't matter one way or the other. I was just curious.

Again, she said no. "His mother just died and he's on his way to her funeral."

"So people are upset because he's crying over his *dead mother*?"

"That's the situation," she told me.

I'd once read where a first-class passenger complained—threatened to sue, if I remember correctly—because the blind person next to him was travelling with a Seeing Eye dog. He wasn't allergic, this guy. Labrador retrievers on the street didn't bother him, but he hadn't paid thousands of dollars to sit next to one, or at least that was his argument. If that had seemed the last word in assholiness, this was a close second.

I said that of course the man could sit beside me, and the flight attendant disappeared into the darkness, returning a few minutes later with the grieving passenger.

"Thank you," she mouthed.

And I said, "No problem."

The Polish man might have been in his mid-forties but seemed older, just as people in my parents' generation had. Foreign blood, or an abundance of responsibility, had robbed him of the prolonged adolescence currently enjoyed by Americans of the same age, so his face, though unlined, seemed older than mine, more used. His eyes were red and swollen from crying, and his nose, which was large and many-faceted, looked as if it had been roughly carved from wood and not yet sanded smooth. In the dim light, he resembled one of those elaborate, handcrafted bottle stoppers—the kindly peasant or good-natured drunk who tips his hat when you pull the string. After settling in, the man looked out the darkened window. Then he bit his lower lip, covered his face with his remarkably large hands, and proceeded to sob, deeply. I felt that I should say something, but what? And how? Perhaps it would be better, less embarrassing for him, if I were to pretend that he wasn't crying—to ignore him, basically. And so I did.

The Polish man didn't want dinner, just waved it away with those king-size mitts of his, but I could feel him watching as I cut into my herb-encrusted chicken, most likely wondering how anyone could carry on at a time like this. That's how I felt when my mother died. The funeral took place on a Saturday afternoon in November. It was unseasonably warm that day, even for Raleigh, and returning from the church we passed people working on their lawns as if nothing had happened. One guy even had his shirt off. "Can you beat that?" I said to my sister Lisa, not thinking of all the funeral processions that had passed me over the years—me laughing, me throwing stones at signs, me trying to stand on my bicycle seat. Now

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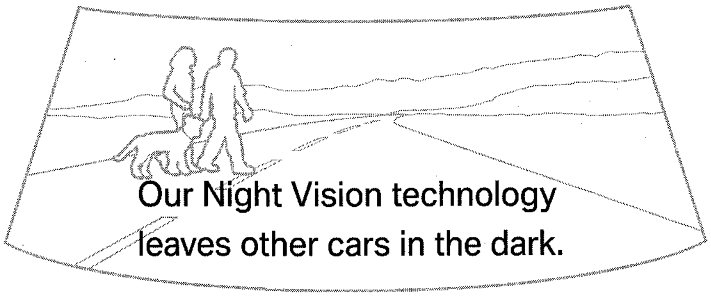

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A FEAST OF DELICIOUS WRITING ON FOOD AND DRINK, SEASONED WITH A GENEROUS DASH OF CARTOONS.

A TASTE OF THE MENU

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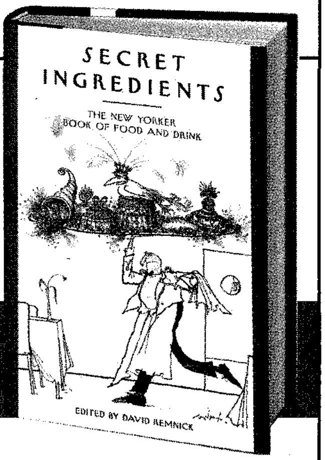

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here I was eating—and it wasn't bad, either. The best thing about this particular airline is that after dinner they offer you a sundae. The vanilla ice cream is in the bowl already, but you can choose from any number of toppings. I order the caramel and chopped nuts and the flight attendant spoons them on before my eyes. "Is that enough sauce, Mr. Sedaris?" she'll ask, and "Are you sure you don't want whipped cream?" It would be years before I worked up the courage to ask for seconds, and, when I finally did, I felt like such a dope. "Do you think, um . . . I mean, is it possible to have another one of those?"

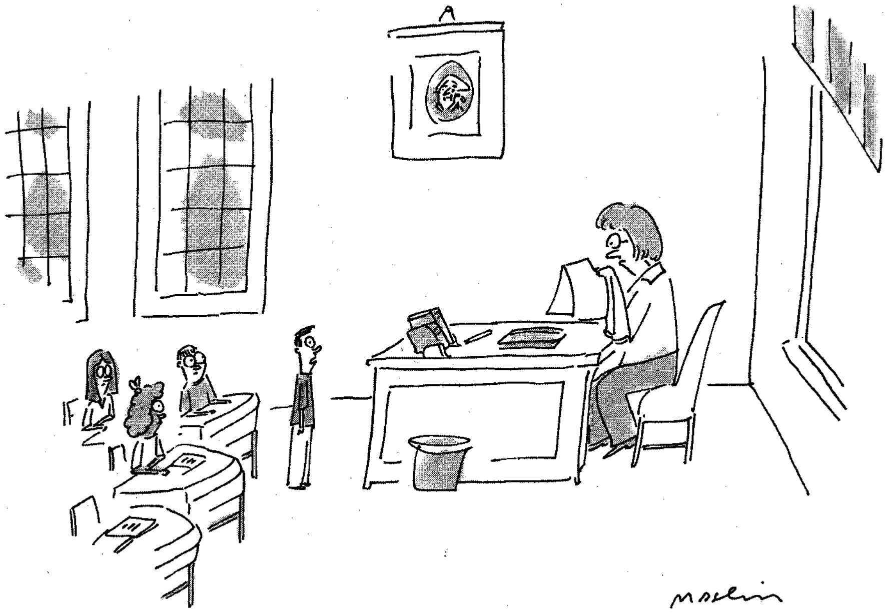
"Well, of course it is, Mr. Sedaris. Have a third, if you like!"

That's Business Elite for you. Spend eight thousand dollars on a ticket and, if you want an extra thirteen cents' worth of ice cream, all you have to do is ask. It's like buying a golf cart and having a few tees thrown in, but it still works. "Golly," I say. "Thanks!"

In the years before I asked for seconds, my sundae would be savored—each crumb of cashew or walnut eaten separately, the way a bird might. After those were gone, I would recline a bit and start in on the caramel. By the time the ice cream itself was finished, I'd be stretched out flat, watching a movie on my private screen. The control panels for the seats are situated on a shared armrest and it would take me a good three or four flights before I got the hang of them. On this trip, for instance, I kept mashing the buttons, wondering why they failed to work: feet up, feet down, head back, head forward. I was two seconds from calling the flight attendant when I looked to my right and saw the Polish man keening and bucking against his will. It was then that I realized I had the wrong control panel. "Sorry about that," I said. And he held up his pan-size hand, the way you do when you mean "No hard feelings."

When my empty bowl was taken away, I leafed through the in-flight magazine, biding my time until my neighbor's dizziness wore off and he could fall asleep. In an effort to appear respectful, I'd already missed the first movie cycle, but I didn't know how much longer I could hold out. Up ahead, in the cheerful part of Business Elite, I heard someone laugh. It wasn't the practiced chuckle you offer in response to a joke but something more genuine, a bark almost. It's the noise one makes when watching stupid movies on a plane, movies you'd probably never laugh at in the theatre. I think it's the thinness of the air that heightens your reactions—and not just to comedy, either.

Take my seatmate. The man was crying again, not loudly but steadily, and I wondered, perhaps unfairly, if he wasn't overdoing it a bit. Stealing a glance at his blocky, tear-stained profile, I thought back to when I was fifteen and a girl in my junior high died of leukemia, or " 'Love Story' disease," as it was often referred to then. The principal made the announcement and I, along with the rest of my friends, fell into a great show of mourning. Group hugs, bouquets laid near the flagpole. I can't imagine what it would have been like had we actually known her. Not to brag, but I think I took it hardest of all. "Why her and not me?" I wailed.



"My parents didn't do my homework for me, but I did bring them in as consultants."

"Funny," my mother would say, "but I don't remember you ever mentioning anyone named Monica."

My friends were a lot more understanding, especially Barbara, who, a week after the funeral, announced that maybe she would kill herself as well.

None of us reminded her that Monica had died of a terminal illness, as, in a way, that didn't matter anymore. The point was that she was gone, and our lives would never be the same: we were people who knew people who died. This is to say that we had been touched by tragedy, and had been made special by it. By all appearances, I was devastated, but in fact I had never been so happy in my life.

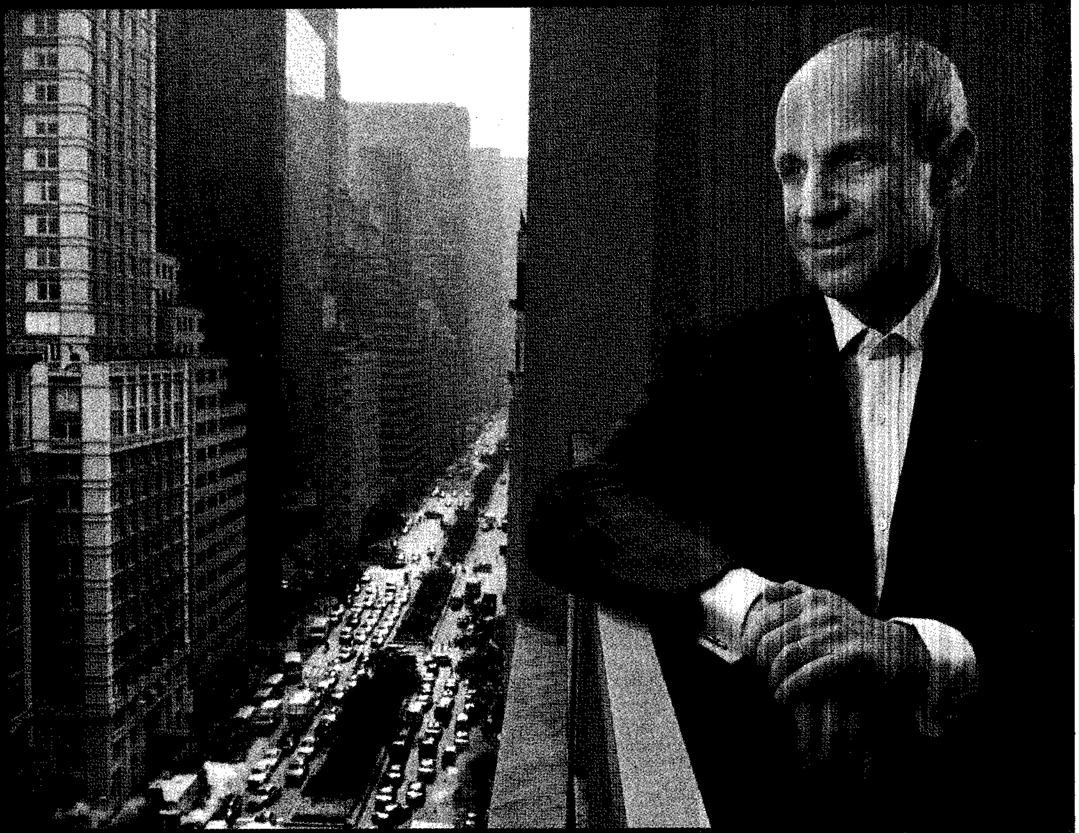
The next time someone died, it was a true friend, a young woman named Dana, who was hit by a car during our first year of college. My grief was genuine, yet still, no matter how hard I fought, there was an element of showmanship to it, the hope that someone might say, "You look like you just lost your best friend."

Then I could say, "As a matter of fact, I did," my voice cracked and anguished.

It was as if I'd learned to grieve by watching television: here you cry, here you throw yourself upon the bed, here you look in the mirror and notice how good you look with a tear-stained face.

Like most seasoned phonies, I roundly suspect that everyone is as disingenuous as I am. This Polish man, for instance. Given the time it would take him to buy a ticket and get to J.F.K., his mother would have been dead for at least six hours, maybe longer. Wasn't he over it yet? I mean, really, who were these tears for? It was as if he were saying, "I loved my mother a lot more than you loved yours." No wonder his former seatmate had complained. The guy was so

For JONATHAN TISCH, co-chairman of the board of Loews Corporation and CEO of Loews Hotels, success in business and life means partnering with others.



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

[CIT: BEHIND THE BUSINESS]

As the scion of a successful family with many business interests, you had many options. Why hospitality?

When you're the son of Bob Tisch, who could walk through a hotel lobby and greet guests and co-workers by name, it's in the genes. When I was 8 or 9, our family would take vacations at our hotel in Florida and I'd get bored sitting by the pool and gravitate to the front desk or go answer the telephone. I love being with people and get pleasure out of making them feel welcome and comfortable. The hotel business allows me to create environments and experiences that people can enjoy. It was an easy decision for me.

How did your education in political science shape your worldview?

In the business world, you can't be successful unless you strike a balance with the different constituencies you interact with. Leading an organization is based on common sense and on surrounding yourself with people who complement your skills and help make you successful. All of that comes back to an understanding of "politics" and people working together for the greater good.

You've written in *Chocolates on the Pillow Aren't Enough* that customer loyalty is waning. How do you keep customers coming back?

Consumers today are smart and spoiled. They have a lot of choices and access to information via the Internet. In the hospitality industry, we've seen 28 new brands emerge within months. Consumers are looking for something more than a great product or service; they're looking for a relationship with an organization that will truly enrich their lives. The only sure way to establish lasting connections with customers is by providing them with experiences that are unique, memorable, delightful and rewarding. The trick today is to turn a transaction into an experience, a customer into a guest. That comes back to service. And that's why we invest heavily in our people.

Jonathan Tisch

[CIT: BEHIND THE BUSINESS]

You say in your bestseller, *The Power of We*, that enduring success comes through partnerships. How has Loews used partnerships to succeed?

We're fairly small compared with the biggest names in lodging. While we have 19 hotels, including one under construction in Atlanta, some of our competitors have thousands. We all have marble in the lobbies, flat-screen TVs and spas. We differentiate ourselves through our service. To have the supremely comfortable service we are known for requires us to partner with our co-workers. That means understanding their needs and giving them the tools and support to allow them to succeed. To broaden our reach, we partner with other brands that share our values. A great example is Chef Emeril Lagasse. He has opened restaurants at the Loews Miami Beach Hotel and the Loews Royal Pacific Resort in Orlando. Both are very successful. The ability to extend our brand through these relationships is critical because we don't have the advertising and marketing budgets of our competitors.

Your father and uncle had one of the most successful partnerships in recent business history. What made it work?

Larry Tisch was "Mr. Inside." He was able to dissect a balance sheet unlike anyone I've ever met and when assessing deals, he would give up a bit on the upside to protect the downside. Bob Tisch was "Mr. Outside" and an operations master. He treated everyone with respect and it was his natural understanding of the human side of the business that really set him apart. Our goal is to take those values into the much more complicated global environment and make this a corporation that is of the future as much as of the past.

Does co-owning the New York Giants have any impact on your other business ventures, or vice versa?

The NFL has only 32 teams, so NFL owners are a very small club. We have a responsibility to fans to put out a good product in an environment where everyone is going to have fun and be safe. We're taking that contract with fans to the next level with the new facility we're building in the Meadowlands. My background in hospitality is helpful in terms of making the fan experience more comfortable and enjoyable—creating more appealing concourses, putting up monitors by the concession stands, etc. My brother Steve, who's an Academy Award-winning producer, brings an entertainment sensibility. When the stadium opens in the fall of 2010, we think fans are going to be very happy.

What was the genesis of your annual "Now Who's Boss?" Day?

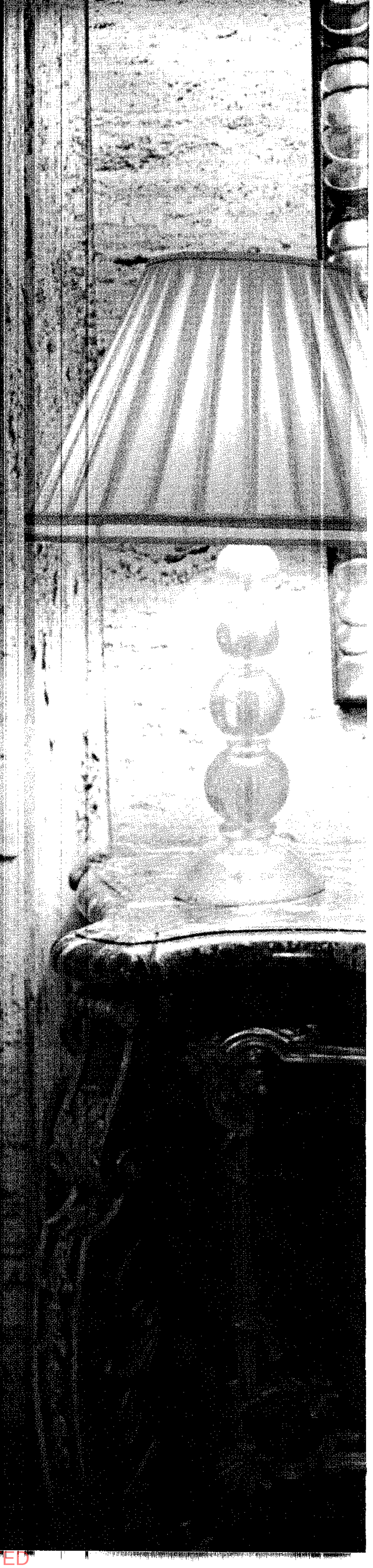
Several years ago, I appeared on a cable program of the same name that explored what happens when a CEO is put back in frontline positions at his or her own company. I had nine tasks to perform: bell staff, housekeeping, pool attendant, etc. I learned from that experience that the decisions I make about Loews are meaningless unless I have buy-in from my 7,500 co-workers. I made some immediate changes: More comfortable uniforms and better check-in software are two examples. Now, we've instituted our own annual "Now Who's Boss?" Day, when senior managers relearn all the aspects of the business.

And now you have your own program, *Beyond the Boardroom*, on CNBC?

I'm very excited about this program. It's a series of one-on-one conversations with America's leading CEOs. In a casual and relaxed atmosphere, we get to know these captains of industry, their backgrounds, the beginnings of their careers, and the experiences along the way that affect how they think and contribute to their success today. Along with the viewers, I learn a lot from each of the guests.

You've received many honors for your good work. Of which are you proudest?

When Tufts University named the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, I was incredibly proud and humbled. I believe higher education is among the most effective means of instilling a sense of responsibility and community. The college teaches students how to become active citizens once they graduate, because no matter what business or enterprise you are in, everyone has a responsibility to be a good citizen and to serve the communities around them.



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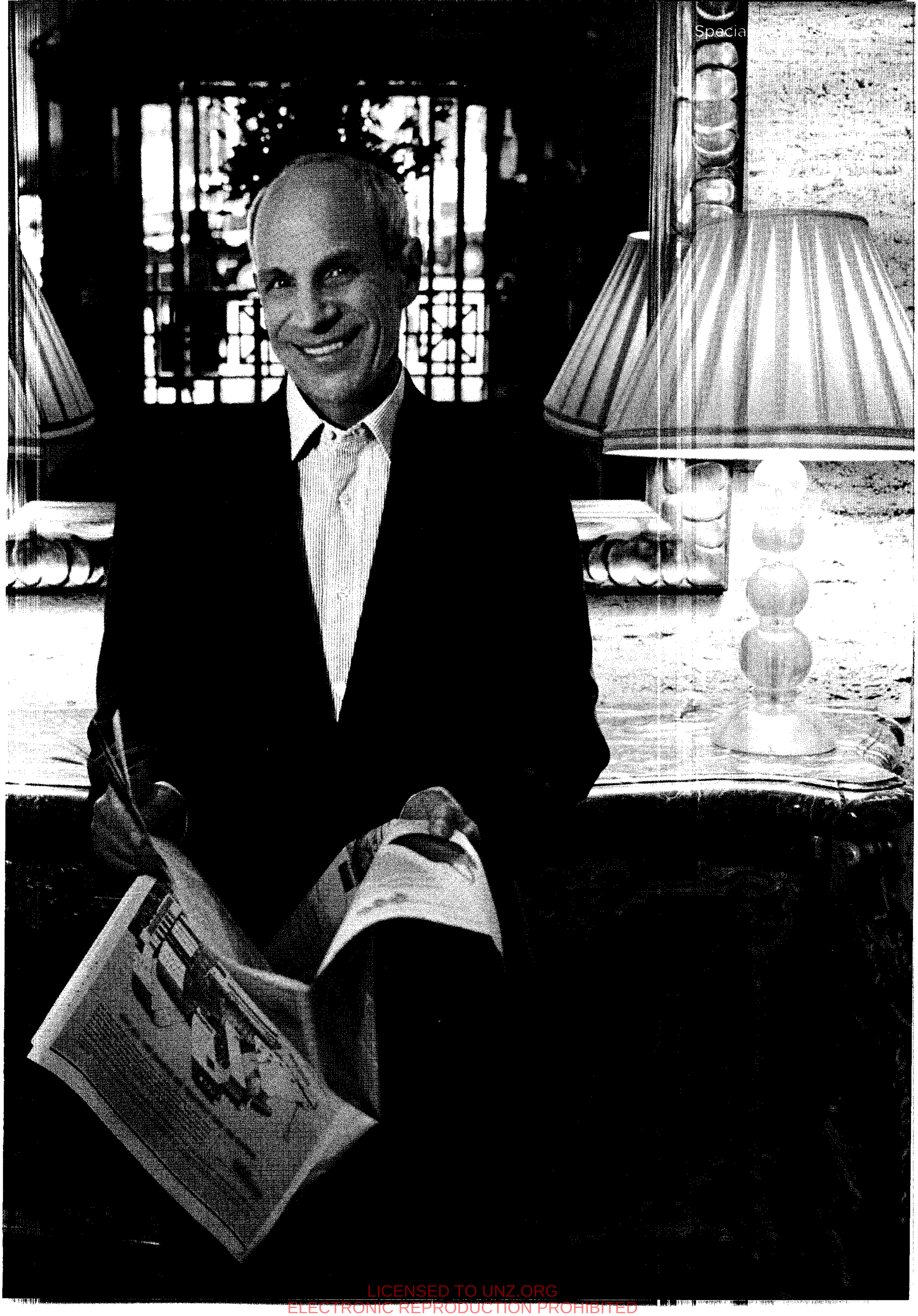

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competitive, so self-righteous, so, well, over the top.

Another bark of laughter from a few rows up and it occurred to me that perhaps my sympathy was misplaced. Perhaps those tears of his were the by-product of guilt rather than sorrow. I envisioned a pale, potato-nosed woman, a tube leaking fluids into her arm. Calls were placed, expensive ones, to her only son in the United States. "Come quick," she said, but he was too caught up in his own life. Such a hectic time. So many things to do. His wife was getting her stripper's license. He'd been asked to speak at his son's Alateen meeting. "Tell you what," he said, "I'll come at the end of dog-racing season." And then . . . this. She rides to her death on a lumpy gurney and he flies in Business Elite to her funeral. The man killed his mother with neglect and because of that I can't watch a movie on a plane?

I pulled my private screen from its hiding place in my armrest, and had just slipped on my headphones when the flight attendant came by. "Are you sure I can't get you something to eat, Mr. . . . ?" She looked down at her clipboard and made a sound like she was gargling with stones.

The Polish man shook his head no, and she regarded me with disappointment, as if it had been my job to stoke his appetite. *I thought you were different,* her eyes seemed to say.

I wanted to point out that at least I hadn't complained. I hadn't disrespected his grief by activating my screen, either, but I did once she'd retreated back into the darkness. Of the four movies playing, I had already seen three. The other was called "Down to Earth," and starred Chris Rock as an aspiring standup comic. One day, he gets hit and killed by a truck and, after a short spell in Heaven, he's sent back among the living in the body of an elderly white man. The reviews had been tepid at best, but I swear I've never seen anything funnier. I tried not to laugh, but that's a losing game if ever there was one. This I learned when I was growing up. I don't know why it was, exactly, but nothing irritated my father quite like the sound of his children's happiness. Group crying he could stand, but group laughter was asking for it, especially at the dinner table.

The problem was that there was so much to laugh at, particularly during the years that our Greek grandmother lived with us. Had we been older, it might have been different. "The poor thing has gas," we might have said. For children, though, nothing beats a flatulent old lady. What made it all the crazier was that she wasn't embarrassed by it—no more than our collie, Dutchess, was. Here it sounded like she was testing out a chainsaw, yet her face remained inexpressive and unchanging.

"Something funny?" our father would ask us, as if he hadn't heard, as if his chair, too, had not vibrated in the aftershock. "You think something's funny, do you?"

If keeping a straight face was difficult, saying "No" was so exacting that it caused pain.

"So you were laughing at nothing?"

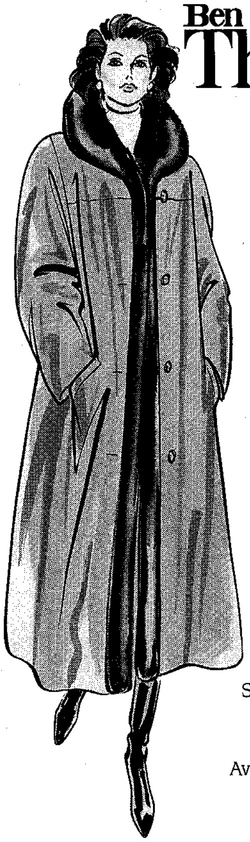
"Yes," we would say. "At nothing."

Then would come another mighty rip, and what was once difficult would now be impossible. My father kept a heavy serving spoon next to his plate, and I can't remember how many times he brought it down on my head.

"You still think there's something to laugh about?"

Strange that being walloped with a heavy spoon made everything seem funnier, but there you have it. My sisters and I would be helpless, doubled over, milk spraying out of our mouths and noses, the force all the stronger for having been bottled up. There were nights when the spoon got blood on it—nights when hairs would stick to the blood—but still our grandmother farted, and still we laughed until the walls shook.

Could that really have been forty years ago? The thought of my sisters and me, so young then and so untroubled, was sobering, and within a minute, Chris Rock or no Chris Rock, I was the one crying on the night flight to Paris. It wasn't my intention to steal anyone's thunder; a minute or two was all I needed. But, in the meantime, here we were: two grown men in roomy seats, each blubbering in his own élite puddle of light. ♦



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"GIULIANI TIME!": THE RUDY QUIZ

BY PAUL SLANSKY

Who said what about Rudolph Giuliani?

1. Schools chancellor Rudy Crew.
2. Columnist Jimmy Breslin.
3. Police Commissioner William Bratton.
4. His son, Andrew.
5. Former Mayor Ed Koch.
6. Al Sharpton.

(a) "His goal in life is to spear people, destroy them, to go for the jugular."

(b) "It's like a cult he's got there. You can't work with the guy unless you're willing to drink the Kool-Aid."

(c) "There's obviously a little problem that exists between me and his wife."

(d) "He is not bound by the truth. I have studied animal life, and their predator/prey relations are more graceful than his."

(e) "[He] didn't bring us together, our pain brought us together. . . . We would have come together if Bozo was the mayor."

(f) "He is a small man in search of a balcony."

7. True or false: When Giuliani blamed an underling named Jerome M. Hauer for the foolhardy idea of placing the city's emergency-management headquarters in the World Trade Center, he was confronted with a memo in which Hauer had argued *against* the site and in favor of a less visible target in Brooklyn.

Which Giuliani appointee did what?

8. Housing Development Corporation head Russell Harding.
9. Housing Commissioner Richard Roberts.
10. Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik.

(a) Pleaded guilty to perjury.

(b) Was found guilty of embezzlement and possession of child pornography.

(c) Was indicted on sixteen charges, including corruption, mail fraud, and tax fraud.

11. Who is Leo D'Avanzo?

(a) The Grammy Awards official whose refusal to let Giuliani read a list of nominees at a press conference caused such tension that the organization decided to move its next ceremony to Los Angeles, costing New York forty million dollars in revenue.

(b) The Mob-connected uncle who employed Giuliani's father as a bat-wielding debt collector.

(c) The artist whose painting of a black Virgin Mary surrounded by images of female genitalia and elephant dung caused Giuliani to threaten to shut down the Brooklyn Museum exhibition in which it hung, calling it "sick stuff."

(d) One of the cops who fired nineteen bullets into the unarmed Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo.

12. What action by the Giuliani administration was found by the courts to have violated the First Amendment rights of New Yorkers?

(a) Preventing taxi-drivers from assembling for a protest.

(b) Requiring city workers to obtain permission to speak to the press.

(c) Refusing to issue a permit for an anti-police-brutality march.

(d) All of the above, and many more.

13. What prompted a legal skirmish between *New York* magazine and the city during Giuliani's mayoralty?

(a) A bus ad touting the magazine as "possibly the only good thing in New York Rudy hasn't taken credit for."

(b) A cover story pointing out how odd it was that he was married to his first wife for fourteen years before finding out that she was not his third cousin but, rather, his second cousin—a confusion that occurred, he explained, "because I never calculated the lines of consanguinity."

(c) A photo spread of his comb-overs that described him as "thin-haired and even thinner-skinned."

(d) A column mocking his vendettas against hot-dog venders, jaywalkers, turnstile-jumpers, and squeegee men.

14. True or false: When Hillary Clinton announced her Senate run, Giuliani attacked her for including, on the pre-ceremony soundtrack, the Billy Joel song "Captain Jack," which the Mayor claimed encouraged masturbation and put out the message "Let's say yes to drugs."

Which Judith did what?

15. Judith Regan.
16. Judith Nathan.

(a) Carried on an affair with a top city official at a house in Southampton.

(b) Carried on an affair with a top city official in an apartment near Ground Zero donated for the use of relief workers.

17. Who is Justin Volpe?

(a) The priest recently hired by Giuliani's consulting firm despite having been accused of molesting young boys.

(b) The police officer who sodomized the Haitian immigrant Abner Louima with a broomstick in a Brooklyn station house.

(c) The live-in partner of the gay friend whom Giuliani moved in with after his wife Donna Hanover, having learned of his intention to divorce her when he announced it at a press conference, refused to leave Gracie Mansion.

(d) The man standing between Giuliani and Alfonse D'Amato in a picture of them, dressed as hoodlums, from a photo-op drug bust in 1986.

18. Who is Elliot Cuker?

(a) The ex-husband of Giuliani's third wife, who said that she called him Rich Little Kike and Jew Boy.

(b) One of the first indicted Wall Street traders subjected to Giuliani's "perp walk" technique.

(c) The adviser who first got Giuliani to appear in drag in public.

(d) The official to whom Giuliani claimed to have said, on the morning of September 11, 2001, "Thank God George Bush is our President."

Answers:
(1) d, (2) f, (3) b, (4) c, (5) a, (6) e, (7) True,
(8) b, (9) a, (10) c, (11) b, (12) d, (13) a,
(14) True, (15) b, (16) a, (17) b, (18) c.

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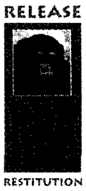

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

TREASURE HUNT

The downfall of the Getty curator Marion True.

BY HUGH EAKIN

One afternoon in April, 1998, Marion True, the curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, in Los Angeles, took a flight from Athens to Rome. When she got off the plane, a carabinieri officer was waiting for her. "He actually picked me up before passport control, just to show how important I was," she recalls. The officer drove her to the Raphael Hotel, near Piazza Navona; in her room, she found a giant bouquet from General Roberto Conforti, then the head of the carabinieri's cultural-heritage-protection force. Conforti had invited her to address an international police conference that he was hosting, on the circulation of stolen art. "This was his courting phase," True told me.

Now retired, General Conforti—often called simply Il Generale—is renowned in the international circle of beat cops, private detectives, insurance executives, customs agents, and state prosecutors involved in the recovery of stolen art. In the nineteen-nineties, he built up his squad into the largest of its kind in the world; he also set out to combat what he considered the most intractable problem in art crime. "It wasn't Picassos, and it wasn't Caravaggios," Conforti, who wears a mustache and speaks in a gravelly basso profundo, said when I met him in Rome, this fall. "It was antiquities." Freshly looted artifacts have no documented history, he pointed out, and criminal organizations were putting them on the international market with impunity; quality pieces could sell for seven or even eight figures. In 1995, True had persuaded the Getty to adopt ethical standards requiring objects proposed for acquisition to have been documented and written about by scholars, and Conforti hoped to enlist her in his efforts to retrieve improperly obtained Italian antiquities from the Getty and other American museums. "We thought the Getty was ready to work with us," Conforti said.

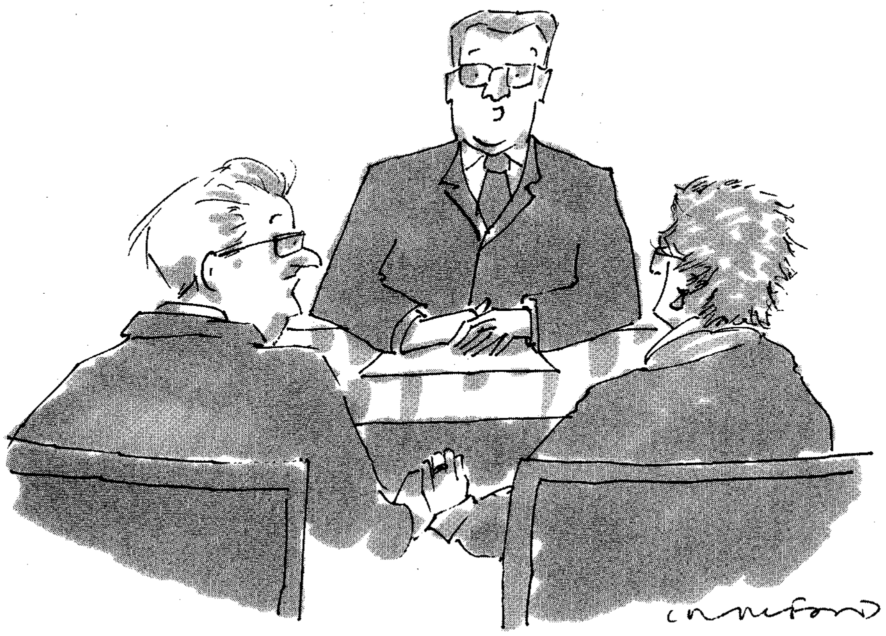
At the time, True was a frequent participant in Italian archeology conferences, where she talked about the "brutally direct evidence" of looting and about her efforts to change the Getty's image as the "most aggressively acquiring institution in the world." (The endowment of the J. Paul Getty Trust is $6.4 billion.) Paola Pelagatti, who is one of Italy's leading classical archeologists, says of True, "She made a big impression. She was extremely conscientious—direct in that strong American way." True, who is fair and has striking blue eyes, was also known for her elegant New England manners and her classic wardrobe. "She was very Waspish, very Bostonian," Mario Bondioli-Osio, an Italian diplomat who in the nineties ran a government commission on art recovery, says. "She kind of fit the Italian ideal of elegance, of the well-turned-out lady," says John Papadopoulos, a professor of archeology at U.C.L.A. and a former associate curator at the Getty, who travelled with her to Italy on several occasions.

At Conforti's conference, True addressed a group that included representatives of Scotland Yard, Interpol, the U.S. Customs Service, and the Gendarmerie Nationale. "Among the things I talked about was a big cult statue, the Aphrodite," True says. Depicting a Greek goddess clad in billowing drapery, the statue was seven and a half feet tall and had been, as True said in her presentation, "one of the museum's most controversial acquisitions" when it was bought by the Getty from a London dealer, in 1988, for eighteen million dollars. A rare surviving example of late-fifth-century-B.C. sculpture, it had been created in an unusual manner: the covered body was limestone; the exposed head, arms, and feet were white marble. Its provenance was unknown, but reports had circulated in the American and the Italian press that it had been excavated recently at Morgantina, a frequently looted site in central Sicily.

"Despite the best efforts of the press, no evidence has come forward to this day to substantiate its suggested provenance of Morgantina," True said at the conference. "However, the statue does represent an important document in the history of monumental sculpture." She continued, "It is most certainly a product of a workshop in the western Greek colonies. For this reason, the museum has agreed to work with Italian colleagues on a complete technical study of the statue." In an effort to determine the Aphrodite's origin, True had sent limestone samples to geologists in Palermo. (The samples matched limestone found in Sicily, but the geologists could not identify a specific site.) In her presentation, True also mentioned several objects that the Getty had voluntarily repatriated after the museum determined that they had been stolen or illegally exported. Her lecture was applauded. "She spoke well," Conforti recalls.

Today, True, who is fifty-nine, is best known as the target of a sprawling carabinieri investigation of American museums and the illegal antiquities market. In April, 2005, she was indicted in Rome, charged with conspiracy to traffic in tens of millions of dollars' worth of looted Greek vases, Etruscan bronzes, terracottas, and other objects. True allegedly obtained these artifacts through an international network run by the American antiquities dealer Robert E. Hecht, Jr., who is a co-defendant in her case, and by an Italian dealer named Giacomo Medici, who was convicted of trafficking in 2004, and who was described in his sentencing documents as perpetrating "one of the greatest thefts against the Italian state ever recorded." According to the prosecution, the conspiracy involved top dealers and private collectors in London and New York, along with art restorers in Zu-

"There was an etiquette I absorbed," True says. "The issue of 'Where did you get this?' was not discussed." Photograph by Steve Pyke.



"I might remind you, John, that 'Lorraine never stops yakking' is not yet grounds for divorce in the state of Ohio."

• •

rich, middlemen in Geneva, and tomb robbers and smugglers in Italy. True denies any wrongdoing.

"Marion True had a double nature," Paolo Giorgio Ferri, the state prosecutor in the Italian case, says. "Not Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but very similar." Weeks before the trial began, in the fall of 2005, True lost her job at the Getty, after she disclosed that she had taken a loan from Lawrence Fleischman, a well-known antiquities collector based in New York, to help pay for a vacation home on the Greek island of Paros; she obtained the loan just days after Fleischman's collection, which he had amassed with his wife, Barbara, was acquired by the museum, in a deal worth sixty million dollars. In March and April, 2006, Greek police conducted a series of raids on the Paros house, and confiscated ancient stone objects and architectural fragments that they found on the premises. True was subsequently indicted in Athens on charges of trafficking three Greek antiquities owned by the Getty, including a fourth-century-B.C. gold wreath; the Getty has returned all three to Greece.

At the center of these investigations is the Aphrodite, which, like True, has been transformed from pristine goddess to corrupting siren—a symbol of the cupidity and lawlessness of American museums in the face of exquisite loot. Italian officials have presented the story of the cult statue—its passage from Switzerland to London and then Los Angeles, the exorbitant price the Getty paid for it, and the persistent rumors that it was looted from Morgantina—as typical of the Getty's corrupt practices during True's tenure. And although the Getty's administration recently entered a détente with the Italian government, the criminal trial of True and Hecht continues, and True could face a maximum prison term of twenty years if the conspiracy charges are upheld. (Hecht, who also maintains his innocence, is eighty-eight, and cannot be sentenced to jail, under Italian law, because of his age.)

"Sometimes I think it is almost a case of mistaken identity," True said when we met earlier this year. Since leaving the Getty, True and her husband, Patrick de Maisonneuve, a retired French architectural historian, have been living in a small town on the west coast of France, and on Paros. The Paros house, which I visited in September, is a two-bedroom white stucco farmhouse, probably dating from the nineteenth century; the estate, including the property and various furnishings, was valued at four hundred thousand dollars when True bought it, in 1995. It occupies a terraced, walled enclosure on an inland hillside; the neighbors are local farmers who raise chickens and goats. The rooms are modest but elegant, with Indonesian wood furniture. There is a small swimming pool and the sea can be glimpsed in the distance.

During her career, True thought of the house as a refuge from the international museum scene; today, the serenity is a reminder that the world she used to escape from is gone. "Many of the people who were friends I will never hear from again and, frankly, I don't want to hear from anymore," she said. When she is not dealing with her lawyers in Athens and Rome, True cooks, practices piano, and gardens; one of the alleged antiquities confiscated from the house by the Greek police was an old stone box that she had planted with geraniums. Speaking of the charges against her, she said, "There is something horrifying about being accused as a criminal in two different countries that I spent my life promoting."

In 1986, when True became curator of antiquities, the Getty Museum had a billion-dollar bank account and a provincial reputation. It occupied a kitschy replica of a Roman villa, in Malibu, and was known for spending indiscriminately on second-tier Old Master paintings and on ancient Greek and Roman art that not infrequently turned out to be of far more recent vintage. The Getty's first antiquities curator, Jiri Frel, left his post in 1984 after a series of acquisition scandals. Most embarrassing, Frel had successfully pushed for the purchase of a stone kouros—a statue of a young man—that many experts now consider a modern forgery. Like other scholars, True held a low opinion of the Getty's antiquities collection. "It wasn't a question of provenance," she says. "It was a question of quality and value. The collection was sort of a joke. The museum was sort of a joke." True's goal was to bring the Getty's unpedigreed antiquities department into the classical-art establishment.

Born in 1948, True grew up in Newburyport, in eastern Massachusetts, in modest circumstances. Her mother had encouraged an early interest in ancient Greece, developed from books and from occasional trips to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. "It was not just the idea of the artifacts and what they represented—the age and aesthetic attraction," she says. "I loved mythology. I had all my own ideas about what Greece must have been like. In the first grade, my costume for Halloween was a little toga."

True won a scholarship to New York University, where she majored in classics and fine arts, and she attended graduate school at the Institute of Fine Arts and then at Harvard. Before attending Harvard, she worked in the department of classical art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which had been run since the fifties by Cornelius Vermeule. She also studied with Dietrich von Bothmer, a formidable scholar of Greek vases, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She wrote her dissertation on pre-Sotadean statuette vases—wheel-made pottery enhanced by molded sculptural features. "Boston has, I think, the most beautiful of these vases in existence—a figure of an Amazon mounted on a horse," True says.

At the M.F.A., True met Hecht, who was a friend of Vermeule's, and other prominent dealers who visited the museum. Taking time off from graduate school, she worked briefly for Stanley Moss, an Old Masters dealer in New York. "I was a miserable dealer," she says. "I never wanted to sell anything I liked to someone I didn't like."

In 1982, she joined the Getty as a curatorial assistant. At first, she was not directly involved in purchases, but she demonstrated a good eye for material, particularly in her field of Greek vases. "It was unusual for someone that young to have such strong scholarly credentials, and also be knowledgable about the market," John Walsh, who was the director of the Getty during most of True's tenure, recalls; he promoted her to curator in 1986, the year she received her Ph.D.

During her training, True said, it hadn't occurred to her that there might be something unethical about museums acquiring antiquities: this was an essential task of any growing institution, and one for which she had been enthusiastically groomed by Vermeule. (Michael Padgett, a curator of ancient art at the Princeton University Art Museum, who trained at the M.F.A., told me, "When somebody asked Cornelius what his collecting policy was, he would look at them and smile and say, 'I was trained as an attack dog.'") The most prominent dealers were considered connoisseurs themselves, and the long tradition of art-market secrecy meant that they rarely disclosed their suppliers. "There was a kind of etiquette I absorbed," True says. "The issue of 'Where did you get this?' was not discussed."

Outside the world of curators and collectors, however, this etiquette had been challenged. In 1972, Bothmer was involved in a controversy over a red-figure calyx krater, which the Met acquired from Robert Hecht for a then record million dollars. The vase, which is signed by the Athenian artist Euphronios and depicts a scene from the Iliad, had come with a Lebanese provenance, but reports from Italy indicated that it had been recently looted from Cerveteri, an Etruscan site north of Rome. (The Etruscans were among the leading importers of Greek vases.) Some archeologists said that the Met was fuelling the plunder of Etruscan sites, and that the vase's archeological context had been erased. By focussing on aesthetic qualities alone, they argued, the museum had eliminated the possibility of studying the vase as part of a specific burial. Bothmer responded that knowing the vase's final resting spot in antiquity was far less important than having it at the Met, where it could be studied alongside other outstanding examples of Attic pottery. "Through its purchase our holdings in this fascinating field have taken on a new significance," he wrote. "Conversely, this newcomer would lose some of its meaning if it could not be seen and studied in the proper context." At the time, the Italian authorities were unable to prove that the krater had been looted, and True, as an aspiring young classicist, found Bothmer's argument more persuasive. "There weren't many Greek temples around Newburyport," she says. "I got my exposure from museums."

Shortly after True became curator at the Getty, a well-known London dealer named Robin Symes called to say that he had something he wanted to show her, in a warehouse in the Battersea district. What she saw was a larger-than-life-size statue of a Greek goddess that dominated the room. True sensed immediately that it was a work influenced by late Athenian classicism. "The sophistication of the carving was amazing," she recalls. "In terms of not only the modelling of the drapery but the incorporation of movement in the drapery and the sense of atmosphere around the figure. With other sculptures, one feels the imposing nature of them. This one really had dynamism built into the stone."

True had never experienced a work of art in quite this way: "It was something that provoked you. You really felt this is what, when you stood in front of a cult statue, you were intended to feel." Fifth-century-B.C. Greek sculpture was rare enough, but a work this fine, and finely preserved, was almost one of a kind. True consulted with several scholars; they shared her enthusiasm. "Martin Robertson"—an Oxford scholar—"was very cute," True recalls. "We went to see it, we had lunch, and then we went back. He said, 'Let's do like the Persians: First, we discuss it when we're sober. Now that we've had some wine, let's go look at it and discuss it again.'"

The Getty began to consider buying the cult statue. But the provenance presented a dilemma: Symes claimed that it had belonged to the family of a Swiss grocery magnate since the nineteen-thirties, yet it had never been on exhibit or studied by scholars, and its origin was unknown.

In October, 1987, in an internal Getty memo, True wrote, "The market in antiquities is perhaps the most corrupt and problematic aspect of the international art trade. Accepting the premise that the majority of antiquities on the market were likely to have been removed from their countries of origin illegally, can we justify collecting these objects at all?" She answered that the Getty could, "without compromising either personal or institutional standards for ethical behavior." As True explained, if museums didn't collect, important objects lacking provenance might disappear into private hands or a storeroom, and never be studied. "Given these alternatives, purchase by the Getty Museum under conscientious guidelines, followed by prompt exhibition and publication, may be the best possible outcome for such an object."

True viewed the problem as an ethical rather than a legal matter. "Aggrieved governments have had little success in the prosecution of either accused smugglers or dealers, and they have too little evidence to win most cases against large institutions for repatriation of objects believed stolen," she wrote. But she took museums to task for their tendency to "hide the material for a period of time to allow any interest in its whereabouts to die down, and then place it quietly on exhibition." (At the time, the Met was embroiled in a dispute with the government of Turkey over the so-called Lydian Hoard, a group of silver and gold objects acquired by the museum in the late sixties; much of it was kept in storage until 1984. Turkey produced evidence that the objects were looted, and the Met later returned the collection.)

A month later, the Getty adopted a policy requiring it to notify the relevant foreign governments whenever a work was being considered for purchase. If valid information emerged that an object had been illegally removed from its country of origin, the museum would return it, regardless of how much time had passed. The Getty was the first large American collecting institution to be receptive to the Mediterranean countries' concerns.

True and the Getty administration resolved to use the cult statue as a test of the new policy. In August, 1987, the museum had sent photographs of the statue to the Italian culture ministry, and, three months later, the ministry responded that "following research undertaken at the relevant offices of this administration, no information has emerged concerning the provenance and authenticity of the object." Later that year, the statue arrived in Malibu for analysis by Getty conservators, and in the spring of 1988 True prepared a formal acquisition proposal for the Getty's board. She compared the statue, which she identified as likely a depiction of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, to the Parthenon marbles, and suggested that it would be the most important work of Greek sculpture outside Greece and Great Britain. She wrote that the "find spot" was unknown, but that the technique and style of construction suggested a Greek artist working in Sicily or southern Italy.

In June, 1988, just as the deal was being closed, a reporter for *Connoisseur*, a magazine that had run several articles critical of the Getty, informed the museum of a story circulating among Sicilian looters that the statue came from the Morgantina site. True got in touch with Malcolm Bell, the University of Virginia archeologist who directed excavations there. "Although we do not wish to be at the mercy of every journalist's unfounded attack, we also do not wish to pursue the acquisition in obvious disregard for the laws of Italy," she wrote. Bell responded a week later, saying that, although he could not rule out the theory, "I know of no reason to argue that it was found at Morgantina." A few weeks later, the Getty purchased the sculpture from Symes.

The carabinieri were unimpressed by the Getty's due diligence. "The Getty said it had written the ministry about it," General Conforti told me. "But how can you respond without doing verification on the ground?" Within days of the deal's close, Italian police contacted Interpol and the U.S. Customs Service to get more information about the statue's circulation in the market; a telegram was also sent to the Getty by a Sicilian superintendent of antiquities, stating that a police investigation was under way. The carabinieri began investigating tomb robbers in Sicily, and in August, 1988, London police interviewed Symes on behalf of Interpol. Still, the case seemed to stall. "We never heard from them," True says of the carabinieri.

That fall, the Italian culture ministry sent Adriano La Regina, then the archeological superintendent of Rome, to Los Angeles to evaluate the sculpture. "Marion gave me a very warm reception," La Regina recalls. "We talked about whether it came from Greece or from Italy, on stylistic grounds, and I had the idea that it could have come from Sicily or Taranto"—a town in southern Italy. In a report, La Regina wrote, "Dr. True is open to a collaboration aimed at determining . . . the provenance of the sculpture." He added that True believed this research was necessary to arrive at an "appropriately detailed publication of the object." True also explained to him the value of having the

AN AMERICAN IN HOLLYWOOD

After you were bitten by a wolf and transformed
into a monster who feeds on other human beings

each full moon and who, therefore, in disgust

wants to die, you think *The desire to die is not*
feeling suicidal. It abjures mere action. You have

wanted to die since the moment you were born.

Crazy narratives—that lend what is merely
in you, and therefore soon-to-be-repeated,

the fleeting illusion of logic and cause.

You think *Those alive there, in the glowing rectangle,*
lead our true lives! They have not, as we have been

forced to here, cut off their arms and legs.

There, you dance as well as Fred Astaire,
though here, inexplicably, you cannot.

Sewer. Still black water

above whose mirror
you bend your face. Font.

—*Frank Bidart*

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rs Lawrence and Barbara
ho were important clients
l had been filling their East
ith spectacular examples of
leischman was a successful
rican art from Detroit, and
e were prominent patrons
d other museums. (Law-
an died in 1997.)
apt to call me up and say,
st in and he showed me a
now it?'" True says. "And
, I've seen it,' he would ask,
you buy it?' He was very
seen it and didn't buy it,
ething wrong with it. But
re likely to invite me over
see him and Barbara, and
right in front, in the en-
latest acquisition. To sort
at I got and you didn't get
he was happier to have

ly, True's friendship with
ravagant man, put her in
tuations. Barbara Fleisch-
bout a dinner that Symes
r True, in the mid-nineties:
We have a surprise, Mari-
irthday.' And he takes out
ds it to Marion, and in it is
l lapis-lazuli necklace. And
t, and said, 'Oh, it's beauti-
back in the box and said,
don't think so, I can't ac-
she told me, 'I will go to
unch, I will be taken out to
will never be their house
ll never be on their prem-
Or any dealer's.' She had a
ral code." (True says she so
lace that she eventually ar-
t, for some twelve hundred
e New York jeweller who
ymes.)
ler whom True befriended
Medici. She had been in-
dici in 1984, at an auction
n't know who he was, but
hattering," she says. "He was bidding a lot, and he was flashing this smile around." Afterward, True and some colleagues went to the Euler Hotel. "He came in to buy champagne for everybody—that's the way Giacomo was." Medici did not have special training in classical art, or possess the social connections of the more established museum dealers. He also spoke very little English. "Medici was a real bandit, not an antiquarian," Paola Pelagatti, the archeologist, says. But True, who speaks little Italian, says that she did not sense anything awry: "He had opened a gallery in Geneva. The Getty had bought things from him in the past, including things that he had bought at auction." He had also done business with well-known dealers like Robert Hecht. True kept in touch.

In the spring of 1987, True met with Medici and Hecht at Medici's showroom, in Geneva. They showed her two Etruscan bronzes, a tripod and a tall candelabrum. True was interested, and the objects were sent to the Getty for consideration. Shortly thereafter, True wrote to Medici in Italian—the text, she says, was translated by her secretary—that she hoped "to be able to acquire" the objects "within the next year." But the Getty did not buy them until 1990, and then it dealt exclusively with Hecht's New York gallery, Atlantis Antiquities. In the acquisition documents, Atlantis Antiquities declared that the objects had been acquired in Geneva in 1985, and legally exported; no mention was made of Medici.

According to Ferri, the Italian prosecutor, these negotiations are part of a pattern that was repeated during True's tenure: True corresponded directly with Medici about desired objects, but his name never appeared in the Getty acquisition files. In 1995, Italian and Swiss police launched the first of several raids on Medici's Geneva warehouse, in which they discovered thousands of ancient artifacts and photographs of ancient artifacts—many of the pictured objects were *sporca di terra*, or "dirty with earth," and had ended up at the Getty and other museums, via Symes or Hecht. Both the bronze tripod and the candelabrum were traced to the Guglielmi Collection, a well-known private collection in Rome, from which they apparently had been stolen. (The Getty has returned both objects.) In 2004, Medici was sentenced in Rome to ten years in prison and fined ten million euros for antiquities smuggling. Claiming innocence, he is appealing his sentence.

Ferri argues that True's letters to Medici, which are written in a "very friendly" style unusual in Italian business correspondence, show she was aware of his illicit dealings. In a January, 1992, letter that has figured prominently in the investigation, True thanked Medici for "the information on the provenance of our three fragmentary proto-Corinthian olpai"—earthenware pitchers. "To know that they came from Cerveteri and the area of Monte Abatone is very helpful for the research of one of my staff members." She enclosed a catalogue of vases in the Getty collection, noting, "I think that you will find many pieces included that you will recognize." She went on to say, "I intend to be in Rome" in February, and again a few weeks later, and "I hope that we will be able to get together and have some further discussions about future acquisitions." For Ferri, these statements expose True's collusion with Medici to buy looted Italian artifacts. "It's a smoking gun," he says.

But True says that she had no reason to avoid contact with Medici, who was not suspected of any crime at the time: "It was not an intentional covering up. Otherwise the letters in our files wouldn't have existed." She sent the catalogue to Medici, she told me, because the Getty had just published it, and it included pieces that had been acquired from Medici's Geneva gallery by her predecessors. The three olpai discussed in her letter had been acquired years earlier by Jiri Frel, without any records. "We had simply been trying to find out who sold the vases to Frel," she says. "What I got back from Medici was where he said the vases had been found." A specialist in proto-Corinthian vases had suggested, on stylistic grounds, that the olpai came from Vulci, a site northwest of Rome, and True and her staff concluded that Medici's information was unreliable. "With a lot of things dealers say or repeat, you don't necessarily know what the source of that information is," True says. "With the Medici photographs, all of a sudden we knew Medici was working with people who were excavating."

True says that in 1991 she met Medici in Rome, while she was attending an academic conference. Medici introduced her to his daughter, who wanted to study archeology, and they had dinner. (The daughter spoke English and "translated," she says.) She says that they did not discuss acquisitions, and claims that the purpose of her flattering letters to Medici and other dealers was to maintain good relations with sources in the market. Harold Williams, the former president of the Getty Trust, says of the carabinieri, "What they discovered was correspondence with Marion. And that was Marion doing her job. I expected her to."

When I asked True if she ever had suspicions about Medici, she said, "I did not have a sense of Giacomo being shady." Speaking of Medici's showroom, she joked, "It was not, you know, crates of stuff with the dirt coming off of it. It was a staid office with a desk." She did remember one awkward encounter, in the early nineties. He had asked her to meet him in a bank vault in Geneva, where he showed her some objects, including some fragments by the Attic vase painter known as the Berlin Painter which had once been part of a vase that was now in the Getty's collection. Medici then pulled out another vase fragment. "It was beautiful," True recalled. "And he said, 'That's for Marion!'" To True, it felt like a bribe. "I said, 'No, Giacomo, if we buy these fragments for the krater, you can give this to the museum. But it's not for me.' That was an uncomfortable thing." (Medici maintains that this was a misunderstanding.) The museum did not buy the fragments, and True says that she did not meet Medici again until 2005, at one of her court hearings: "He was very elegantly dressed, and he came over to me and said, 'I'm sorry.' It's not something anyone else has ever said to me. Whatever else you can say, there is a kind of gentlemanliness about him."

In 1990, Dietrich von Bothmer was about to retire from the Met, and True's enterprising record at the Getty had caught the attention of the Met's director, Philippe de Montebello. "She knew the whole breadth of the field of Greek and Roman art," de Montebello recalled recently. "She had contacts with a lot of collectors—people like the Fleischmans. She also did very good installations." De Montebello offered her Bothmer's job. True was tempted. "I had always thought I wanted to go back to the East Coast," she says. At the time, the Getty was spending $1.2 billion on a new building, in Los Angeles, designed by Richard Meier, and had decided to transform its original home, the Roman villa in Malibu, into a museum for classical antiquities. True took the Met's offer to Getty officials, who promised her a directing role in the villa project. She would be building a museum as well as a collection: "It's a pretty rare thing when you can do everything—ceilings, walls, the inner support structure, gorgeous terrazzo floors—and then design the cases so that they fit with the rest of your architecture." She decided to stay.

One of the primary challenges of the Getty Villa was coming up with a selection of classical art sufficiently representative to justify a stand-alone museum. Unlike her peers at older institutions, True didn't have much of an inventory to draw on. "Early on, I went to Greece and talked to the head of the culture ministry about lending us material from the basements of the national museums," True recalls. "He thought I was a pushy American woman." Laws in Italy and Greece that treated antiquities as national patrimony also made it virtually impossible for foreign museums to borrow them.

In 1991, True delivered a provocative paper before a group of Italian and Greek scholars in Rome. "Archeologists in both the art-rich nations and the collecting nations abroad are particularly vehement in their condemnation of collectors and collecting institutions, most often blaming them for the destruction of sites and contexts," she said. "Yet when we examine the current condition of the sites of legitimate archeological excavations, we often find them neglected and crumbling." She noted that some collections in Italy and Greece had been inaccessible to visitors for "more than a decade," and that, in Rome and Athens, thousands of pieces recovered from professional digs remained uncatalogued, unrestored, and unavailable to scholars. ("In the National Archeological Museum of Athens, there was a room about a third the size of a football field, with Attic grave stelae, funerary lekythoi, loutrophoroi," True told

Objects of contention: the Aphrodite cult statue and two pieces acquired by the Getty from the Fleischman collection.

me. "These pieces were never on view, not cleaned, not conserved.")

True then made a proposal: "One thing that the art-rich nations might do if they sincerely wish to discourage the illicit traffic is to offer the collecting institutions the option of applying their acquisition funds to excavations and to allow them once again to have a share of the finds for exhibition. Today's institutions are enlightened enough to recognize that ownership is not essential, but having interesting, exhibitable material is." She added, "If good, genuine objects are available to collectors and collecting institutions abroad on extended loan, by exchange, or by legitimate purchase, the demand for material that now fuels the black market will all but cease to exist."

The speech caused a stir. "The Greeks especially gave me hell," she recalls. "I mean, who was I to criticize their museums?" Some Italian scholars shared her views, and pressed the Italian government to liberalize its lending policies. But, as Adriano La Regina recalls, "There was huge resistance. Many thought that it would empty out Italian museums."

The Getty continued to build its collection, but True realized that the museum's activities in the antiquities market made it difficult for scholars in Italy and Greece to work with her. "Somehow, we had to respect what they were doing if we wanted them to respect what we were doing," she says. In consultation with colleagues, True decided that it was time to limit ancient-art acquisitions to objects that had previously been written about by scholars and were known to the archeological community. The requirement rendered off limits most objects on the market. The policy change, which eventually prompted Conforti to invite her to speak at the Rome international police conference, was the first of its kind for a large American collecting museum. As True said at a conference at Rutgers University a few years later, "This new amendment brought our period of aggressive collecting to an end."

In the summer of 1994, True was visiting her friend Stella Lubsen, a Dutch archeologist, on Paros, where Lubsen and her husband had a vacation home, when she learned that a beautiful old house nearby was coming on the market. "I had never owned a house before," True says. "I always planned to retire to Greece, and so when this house became available I was desperate to have it. I said to Stella, 'I don't want anyone to have this house but me.' And I spent the next year figuring out how I was going to do this."

COURTESY ITALIAN CULTURE MINISTRY

As with some of her spectacular acquisitions for the Getty, the house purchase would require True to reconcile aesthetic desire with complex financial, legal, and moral considerations. The house was comfortable but not lavish; the Lubsens, moreover, could lend her the money for a down payment. But, as a foreigner, True could not qualify for a Greek mortgage, and American banks refused to lend her money for a house overseas. It occurred to her that her wealthy collector friends the Fleischmans might be able to arrange a loan, but the Getty was preparing a major travelling exhibition of their collection. Soon after she returned from Paros that fall, she asked John Walsh about it. "He commented that it would be problematic, that it could be misinterpreted," she says. "I heeded John's advice."

She brought up the house with the companion of the dealer Robin Symes, Christos Michaelides, who was the well-connected scion of a Greek shipping family. She recalls, "Christos said, 'There is a lawyer in Piraeus named Dimitrios Peppas, who arranges loans for shipping companies. Why don't you talk to him?'" True went to see Peppas, who set up for her a four-year loan at eighteen per cent interest. She accepted and, in the summer of 1995, bought the house. "The idea was that it would give me time to find a longer mortgage," she recalls. But by the spring of 1996 the high-interest Greek loan had become onerous, and she was worried that she might lose the house.

Around this time, True achieved one of the major triumphs of her career: the Fleischmans decided to offer their antiquities collection to the Getty. Several museums had competed for the collection, and many had thought that it was destined for the Met. Philippe de Montebello recalls, "Larry Fleischman had been the first chairman of the Filodori"—the friends of the Greek and Roman Art Department. "And we were very interested in the collection." But the Fleischmans' relations with the Met had soured, and True had co-curated the travelling exhibition, which had a successful run at the Getty.

By late spring, 1996, the Getty was finalizing its agreement with the Fleischmans, who were paid twenty million dollars by the museum and made a tax-deductible donation of objects worth forty million. (True had no final say in the decision.) The more than three hundred works that the collection contained complemented the museum's emphasis in Greek, Roman, and Etruscan art, and there also were many objects, such as small bronzes, in areas where the Getty was weak. And the works were of sufficient quality to allay fears that the Getty's holdings would not be deep and expansive enough to justify the renovated villa.

The Fleischmans came out to Malibu to sign the contract in June. True recalls that they discussed the Paros house at breakfast: "Larry said, 'Now that this is settled—the collection is going to the Getty—would it help if I lent you the money?'" The loan would be structured as a normal mortgage, Fleischman said, and the interest rate would be 8.25 per cent. True immediately agreed. "I did not consult with John Walsh or anyone else about this, as it seemed not to present the same issues as in '94," she says. "I did not see this as a conflict."

One of True's priorities at the Getty was to bring foreign scholars to Los Angeles to study the museum's collection. In the early nineties, True invited Maria Lucia Ferruzza, a Sicilian archeologist, to work on a group of South Italian and Sicilian terra-cottas. "I told her, 'Marion, I'm doing this report, but I'm an archeologist,' " Ferruzza recalls. " 'I'm working on these objects, trying to reconstruct their provenance; naturally, it's possible that they could become subject to restitution claims.' But she always gave me carte blanche."

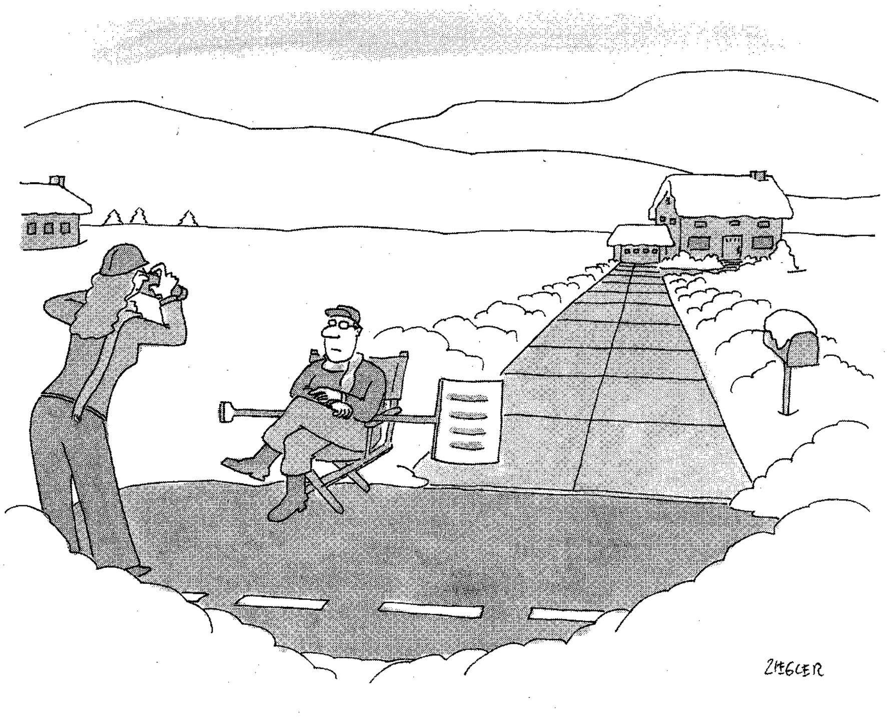
In fact, during the nineties the Getty did return a number of pieces that scholars or members of True's own department identified as having been illegally removed from a particular site or collection in Italy. "These were years when no other American museum dreamed of returning anything," Ferruzza recalls.

One object regarding which True and the Getty felt there was not a case for restitution, however, was the Aphrodite. After the acquisition, Getty researchers continued to study the statue, together with Italian scholars, but no archeological information came to light to pinpoint where it had been found. Moreover, the Italian government had never made a request for the object's return, and True felt that the museum had already done what it could to follow up on the earlier rumors about the Morgantina site.

In 1996, a Swiss man named Renzo Canavesi wrote to the Getty to say that he was the previous owner of the Aphrodite who had sold it to Robin Symes. He claimed to have some fragments that fit the statue, implying that they had something to do with the right arm, and he included some low-quality photocopies of a photograph of what appeared to be the head. True, who had never heard of Canavesi before, was troubled. "My sense was that someone was trying to blackmail us," she says. "Unless there was something he wanted from us, why was he suddenly coming forward, ten years later? If this was someone who wanted to help us understand where the sculpture came from, or give us background information, or help us understand the position of the arm, he would have written to say, 'I would like to help the museum. I can tell you what I know about the sculpture.' " She wrote Canavesi a polite but noncommittal reply, and called Symes. "Symes was furious, because, generally, a dealer never wants his source to go directly to the museum," she recalls. "He said, 'I'll find out and get back to you.' " True, meanwhile, shared her concerns with the Getty leadership, and the matter was dropped.

By this time, General Conforti had launched his large-scale investigation of the antiquities trade. He had followed the Getty and its purchases, and was particularly interested in the Aphrodite. In the early nineties, information obtained by the carabinieri, including testimony by the editor of *Connoisseur*, had been used to indict a group of Sicilians on charges of receiving and smuggling the statue, but the case was dropped for lack of evidence. Later, the carabinieri also turned up a scrawled receipt from Renzo Canavesi. The receipt, which recorded his sale of the statue to Symes for four hundred thousand dollars, stated suspiciously that the statue had been in the Canavesi family's possession since 1939—the very year that Italy passed a landmark antiquities law.

In 1997, Conforti went to Los Angeles and met with Getty officials, including True. Despite his military rank and his police background—he was a Mafia investigator before taking over the art squad—Conforti saw himself as more of a cultural diplomat than a cop. He was given a tour of the new Getty Center, which was soon to open. (The opening exhibition, "Beyond Beauty: Antiquities as Evidence," was curated by True and designed in part as a critique of the aesthetic approach in which she had been trained. The installation juxtaposed traditional displays of classical art, centered on groups of unrelated beautiful objects, with more recent archeological approaches; placards raised questions about authenticity and provenance, suggesting the inher-



ent instability of knowledge about many museum artifacts.) Conforti attended a lunch with True, and presented her with a silver plate bearing the insignia of the carabinieri. "We were trying with this strategy to open a dialogue," Conforti says. "You don't go in with your guns drawn." True, who wore an Armani pants suit for the occasion, recalls the meeting as theatre. "It all seemed like a kind of political game," she says.

When I asked Conforti what impression he had taken away, he described the meeting as cordial but said that he had had misgivings about True and her suggestion to him that the Getty was willing to relinquish works of art: "It almost seemed like"—he switched from Italian to Virgil's Latin—" 'I fear the Greeks even when they come bearing gifts.' "

"You can knock off the Donald Duck voice, Osama. I know it's you."

In 1997, True attended Antiquities Without Provenance, a conference at the University of Viterbo, in the Lazio region of Italy. In one paper, an Italian archeologist named Maria Antonietta Rizzo described how a prized Getty wine cup depicting the sack of Troy, by the Greek painter Onesimos, had been reconstituted from batches of fragments acquired, on nine occasions between 1983 and 1990, from different dealers and by donation. With the help of the carabinieri, Rizzo had traced all the fragments to an illicit excavation in Cerveteri. "Will the P. Getty Museum, here represented in the person of Marion True . . . give back to Italy a work that has been trafficked in such an obvious way?" Rizzo asked.

Rizzo had not warned the Getty about her findings, and True was shocked. "The analysis was pretty damning," True says. As a vase specialist, she had always assumed that collecting and matching fragments—a tradition that dates to the nineteenth century—was a vital part of museum work. "If there were fragments on the market by wonderful painters, I thought it was a really good thing to acquire them—especially if they joined vases in our collection." The Getty's 1995 acquisitions policy had even made an exception for such fragments, stating that they could be acquired without previous publication. Rizzo's analysis showed that dealers had been gaming the system, by looting the fragments of an entire cup and then releasing them onto the market over time.

True felt that she had to respond immediately. She stood up and said that, if Rizzo would send her information to the Getty, the museum would undertake to return the work to Italy. In January, 1998, the Italian culture ministry presented the Getty with a dossier; a year later, the Getty, working with the ministry, arranged the return of the work, together with two pieces of Roman sculpture—a torso of Mithra and a stone head—that the museum had identified as belonging to Italy. The return of a work of Attic pottery of this importance had never been made by an American museum, and True accompanied the shipment to the Villa Giulia, in Rome, which houses the national museum of Etruscan art. "We arrived late at night, to deposit the objects at the museum, and returned the next morning for the opening of the crates," True says. "The director of the Villa Giulia came down to see them, and there were various press people there."

Not everyone was pleased, True recalls: "The carabinieri were unhappy, because every time we returned something we did it with the culture ministry." The carabinieri remained interested in the Aphrodite and other objects still at the Getty, and True had not followed up with them, despite the warm reception Conforti had given her in Rome the previous year. True says, "They thought they would woo me, and, when I didn't respond, they decided to slam me."

Conforti denies that there was a rivalry with the ministry, but confirms that he was frustrated about the Aphrodite. "Our anger was, our investigations had given us the proof, but we couldn't get what we wanted," he says.

Conforti had also begun to work with Paolo Giorgio Ferri, the Rome prosecutor, and was learning more about True's contacts with Medici and other dealers. At the Villa Giulia, Ferri confronted True. "I didn't even know who he was—somebody told me he was a judge," she recalls. "And he said to me, 'Maybe next time you'll give back the Morgantina Aphrodite.'" True briefly lost her composure. "I said, 'Maybe next time there'll be some evidence that it comes from Morgantina.' Which, of course, I shouldn't have." (Ferri doesn't recall discussing the Aphrodite.) Later that year, True attended a conference at Cambridge University on the trade in illicit antiquities, which was co-sponsored by the Getty. "The carabinieri were there," she says. "One of them came up to me and said, 'The General wants you to know that he still dreams of his Morgantina goddess!'"

In 1999, the Italian government asked the U.S. State Department to impose sweeping restrictions on the importation of classical antiquities. In exchange, Italy agreed to send more pieces abroad on long-term loan. The request, later approved, covered virtually every category of Greek, Roman, and Etruscan material, and True was the only American curator who publicly supported it. "We have been working over the past ten years to encourage closer collaboration with the government of Italy for loans, long-

"It's Christmas, Stephen. Did you remember to tip the children?"

• •

term loans, and exchange of material in lieu of collecting, and have modified our acquisition policy accordingly," she explained in a hearing at the State Department, in the fall of that year. "An acquisition policy in this country has to deal with the issue of illicitly removed material." She added, "I am here of my own free will, at my institution's encouragement. There's absolutely no pressure from the government of Italy, and there would be nothing gained by the Italian ministry putting pressure on us."

On September 1, 2000, True was attending a classical-archeology conference in Berlin when she received a phone call from Richard Martin, a lawyer for the Getty. Martin told her that she was being targeted in an Italian criminal-conspiracy investigation related to looted antiquities. "I was so upset I couldn't go to dinner," True recalls. "That this was personally aimed at me, and not at the institution, was all the more astonishing. I had no objects, and I had no gain from the objects." She flew back to Los Angeles the next day.

The investigation was tied to the discovery in Geneva, five years earlier, of the trove of photographs belonging to Giacomo Medici. True was the only curator who was named in the investigation, although works passed on by Medici had ended up at numerous museums, and some objects that the Getty had bought were acquired before True's tenure began.

In a memo, Martin, who had experience working in Italy, surmised that the investigation was driven, in part, by ulterior aims. "In the past, General Conforti has sought return of several items which, upon analysis and review of our policies, the Getty concluded were not appropriate to return," he wrote. "General Conforti has been frustrated by that position and by the Getty's close relationship with the Ministero dei Beni Culturali—which received those items the Getty returned to Italy, with great media attention. . . . Accordingly, he has . . . a grudge to pursue against Dr. True and the Getty."

By this point, Italian scholars had concluded that the limestone of the Aphrodite was Sicilian, and for the carabinieri the case was closed. In 2001, a Sicilian judge convicted Renzo Canavesi in absentia for receipt of stolen goods. The Getty, however, did nothing in response. "The Aphrodite was crying out for vengeance," a former carabinieri officer says. "It was still at the museum." (Canavesi's conviction was later overturned, because the statute of limitations had expired.)

The photographs and documents discovered in Medici's warehouse provided the carabinieri with various ways to go after the Getty. Not only did the museum have more than forty objects that appeared in photographs in Medici's files; there were also True's letters to Medici. As Martin observed in his memo, the Getty's own records contained True's "troublesome" correspondence with Hecht, Medici, and Symes, and also photographs of items offered for sale which were now known to be part of Medici's hoard. By making True the object of a criminal investigation, the carabinieri could put a new kind of pressure on museums. "Marion True was the tip of the iceberg," Ferri, the prosecutor, told me. "Many other curators in the past had had the same dealings she did. But I had more evidence—it was easier to go on trial with True."

Although the letters were suggestive, they were insufficient to bring conspiracy charges against True. Martin, in his own confidential review of the Getty's files, also concluded that none of the letters "amounts to proof of Dr. True's knowledge that a particular item was illegally excavated or demonstrates her intent to join a conspiracy."

But the carabinieri had long argued that museums used private collectors to launder antiquities, and Ferri was particularly interested in True's relationship with the Fleischmans. True's turn against the antiquities trade, and her frequent participation in archeology conferences about looting, had irritated her colleagues at other American museums, who had not been consulted about the Getty's policy shift. "It was completely unilateral," Philippe de Montebello told me. Critics were especially riled by the Getty's acquisition of the Fleischman collection, just months after the 1995 policy was announced. The collection had been studied and published, as the new Getty rules required, but the vast majority of the objects had been written about only in the exhibition catalogue issued by the Getty itself, two years before the deal was made. In fact, in the subsequent carabinieri investigation more than ten works in the Fleischmans' collection were traced to Medici.

In early 2002, Ferri put out an international arrest warrant for a Swiss dealer named Frida Tchacos Nussberger, who knew True, Symes, and the Fleischmans, and who was wanted in connection with an unrelated antiquities theft. She was arrested in Cyprus, and while she was detained she agreed to let Ferri interview her. At one point, Tchacos said of True, "Every time I showed her something, she said to me, 'Beautiful, interesting, I can speak to Fleischman about it.' . . . After that it was clear how things went between Fleischman [and] Marion True. . . . Dealers would offer things to Marion True, and she, as with me, would refuse or buy. . . . But with me she would refuse and then she would receive a phone call from Fleischman asking, 'What do you have for me?' . . . And so, after waiting many many months, perhaps years, reserving something for Marion True, Fleischman would enter into the game." For Ferri, Tchacos's statements confirm that the Fleischmans had been buying works on behalf of the Getty all along. "Frida was the missing link," Ferri told me.

As part of her agreement with Ferri, Tchacos avoided conspiracy charges and was given a suspended sentence for handling smuggled goods; she was released on probation. Elsewhere in the interview, her words suggest that she has been coached by the prosecutor: "About Marion True, I can say something, yes. Marion True, I learned a lot about her by reading your . . . I didn't know that Medici knew Marion True."

True considers the allegations nonsensical. "By the time I met Larry Fleischman, he had a big collection, and many things he bought from Symes," she says. "And I bought from Symes. So why did I need Fleischman to buy from Symes for me?" True believes that Tchacos's statements reflect, in part, the general hostility dealers felt toward her after the Fleischman deal. "One of the immediate effects of our acquiring the Fleischman collection was that there were no antiquities purchases for four years," she says. "One dealer said to Larry, 'You took away my best client.'"

Not long after True learned that Ferri was pursuing her, she tried to come to terms with the Italians. The prosecutor had provided the Getty with a list of forty-two objects at the museum that were included in his investigation, and in June, 2001, True gave him a voluntary, two-day deposition in Los Angeles, in which he showed her various photographs from the Medici raids. "It was very upsetting," she says. "There was a photograph of the griffins"—a rare fourth-century-B.C. painted marble sculpture of two griffins killing a stag, which had been acquired before True's tenure—"in the trunk of somebody's car." True recommended that the Getty take immediate action to return the griffins and some of the other works on Ferri's list.

In 2002, a group of Getty officials travelled to Rome to meet with officials from the culture ministry and Conforti, who was about to retire. In the meeting, the Italians said that they wanted to approve all future purchases made by the Getty, and they asked that the Getty stop doing business with certain dealers; they also made clear that they were seeking the return of a number of works owned by the Getty, including the Aphrodite. But the Getty leadership balked at the restrictions and was not prepared to make a restitution offer. "They lost the chance to make a *bella figura*," Conforti told me.

Three years later, just before True was indicted, the Getty finally offered to return three objects to Italy. But the offer did not include the griffins or the objects from the Fleischman collection on Ferri's list. Barbara Fleischman, who became a trustee of the Getty in 2000, is furious about this. "If I had known of any questions about works in my husband's collection, I would have said, 'Send them back!'" she says. (In 2006, Fleischman resigned from the board to protest the museum's failure to respond to the Italian investigation and defend True in the press.)

The Getty Villa was expected to open in November, 2005. True had spent years working on the installation, which she had organized thematically, rather than according to the usual dry chronology: "Dionysos and the Theatre," "Athletes," "Stories of the Trojan War," "Women and Children." It was an unabashedly aesthetic presentation, but it allowed viewers to draw lively connections between works of say, Greek and Roman or Greek and Etruscan civilization. Once the villa opened, True planned to retire; she also hoped to write a monograph on the Aphrodite, which was to be placed at the center of the "Gods and Goddesses" gallery, on the main floor.

On April 1, 2005, seven months before the fifteen-year villa project was to open, True was indicted in Rome.

At first, many of True's colleagues in Europe brushed off the prosecution. "I remember someone telling me, 'You're not really important in Italy unless someone is investigating you,'" True recalls.

In the summer of 2005, however, the California attorney general opened an investigation of the Getty Trust, for misuse of funds. (In the end, no legal action was taken.) The Getty was in turmoil, and no

"This man is a wonderful primary-care husband."

one seemed to want to deal with True's looming trial; she found herself increasingly isolated from the museum administration. Several years earlier, a lawyer in London who was investigating Symes, the dealer, passed on to Getty officials the story that Symes had paid for True's house on Paros. At the time, True told the Getty, correctly, that the allegation was false, and the matter was dropped. In late September, 2005, however, the Symes story began circulating in the press. (When, later, it reached the Greek papers, True told me, "It was Michaelides"—Symes's companion—"handing me the money.") Getty officials confronted True, and she provided documents showing that she had a regular mortgage and that there had been no gift from Symes, but she disclosed that she had been referred to a Greek lender by Michaelides for the first loan, and that she had replaced it with the loan from the Fleischmans. True was found to be in violation of the Getty's conflict-of-interest policy, and immediately suspended; on October 1, 2005, she resigned.

As True's supporters saw it, the loan controversy was simply a way for the Getty to distance itself from her before the trial in Rome began. The immediate effect, though, was to help broaden the case against True and the Getty. Just a month after True's departure from the Getty, according to Greek court documents, a carabinieri officer wrote an e-mail to a counterpart in Greece:

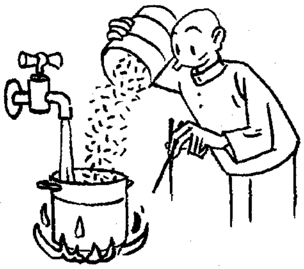
> As you know this is a hot moment for our institutions to pursue museums and/or individual to return works of art illegally removed or exported from their country of origin. Yesterday we have repatriated three valuable objects returned "voluntarily" by the Getty. . . . The Italian prosecutor in charge for the investigation against Marion True, Robert Hecht, Giacomo Medici, Robin Symes, etc., told me that he is in possession of hot pieces of information that could be useful for the Greek authorities to investigate them.

That fall, the Greek government stepped up pressure on the Getty to return four objects, three of which had been acquired by True. The following spring, the Greek police staged their high-profile raids of True's Paros house, and photographs of some items they confiscated appeared in the press. For much of the public, the transformation of True from distinguished museum impresario and advocate of ethics reform to unscrupulous conspirator was now complete.

Today, many of the reforms that True talked about in the nineties have taken hold. Over the past two years, other American museums have stopped buying unprovenanced antiquities, and several, including the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Met, have returned important pieces to Italy. Italy has meanwhile started allowing important works from its storerooms to travel to the United States, and Conforti himself has become an advocate of "long-term loans," conceding that the illegal market of the eighties and nineties was encouraged by Italy's restrictive policies. "It was prohibition, pure and simple," he told me.

Yet True's considerable influence on these developments has far less to do with her pronouncements and policy changes at the Getty than with the criminal case against her, which has unfolded mostly in the international press. Few people have actually witnessed the proceedings that intermittently take place—some twenty court dates over two years—in a nondescript courthouse near the Vatican, and which often have little to do with True. An air of amused detachment prevails in the courtroom. The co-defendants are not required to attend, and True has rarely appeared, although Robert Hecht, a jovial autodidact and polyglot, has made a point of going to as many sessions as he can, and is fond of interrupting Ferri and his expert witnesses to correct art-historical mistakes.

At one hearing I attended in September, Giacomo Medici turned up. He was deeply tanned, with white sideburns and green-rimmed aviator glasses, and was wearing a polo shirt, tan trousers, and a large gold ring. He no longer sits in on the trial—at an earlier hearing, he quarrelled with a *tombarolo*, or grave robber, who was serving as a prosecution witness—but he likes to chat with reporters outside the courtroom. ("They haven't produced one piece of evidence against me," he told me.)

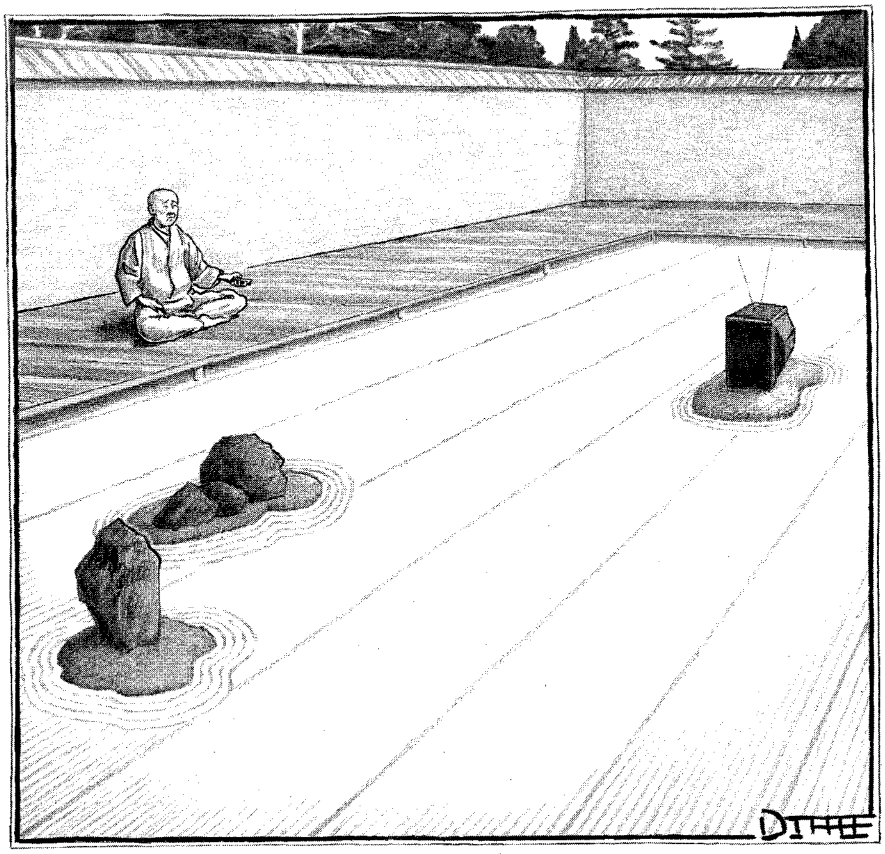


For all True's efforts to reach an accommodation with the Mediterranean countries, the Getty has come out far worse than other museums that had long brushed off Italy's repatriation efforts. By talking openly about the problems of the market, and acting to return pieces that hadn't been requested, she attracted scrutiny of the rest of the collection. And the Getty's retreat behind teams of lawyers during the investigation compounded the sense among Italian officials that the museum had something to hide. Although the Met has made far fewer concessions than the Getty, and makes no pretense about the importance of the market and private collectors to its impressive Greek and Roman collection, Philippe de Montebello has been praised in Italy for a deal that he negotiated, in person, in early 2006, to return the Euphronios krater and twenty other pieces, in exchange for long-term loans of the museum's choosing. "Naturally, he must defend the interests of his museum," Conforti told me. "But he played the game cleanly."

Among Italian scholars and archeologists who knew True in the nineties, few are willing to speculate on her guilt or innocence. But several expressed dismay at the waning of the collegial, scholarly approach that True tried to establish a decade ago. "We are returning to the position 'You have to return these things to us because they are ours,'" Adriano La Regina told me. "It's not as if the returned objects suddenly gain a provenance. It's in bad taste, the way these objects are presented as masterpieces. They come back to us without any more contextual meaning than they had in the United States."

This is particularly true in the case of the cult statue of Aphrodite. In August, after more than eighteen months of negotiation, the Getty agreed to return the sculpture to Italy, along with several dozen other objects cited in the True case. For the carabinieri, the agreement was an acknowledgment, after years of resistance by the Getty, that the work had been looted from Morgantina. When the work returns to Italy, in 2010, it will likely be installed in Aidone, a tiny town near the site.

But the Getty's decision to return the sculpture had little to do with the carabinieri's Morgantina theory, which Getty officials say is no more certain than before. The decision was made because investigators hired by the Getty found evidence that calls into question the story told by Renzo Canavesi, whom they interviewed twice, and suggests that the work was looted in recent decades. All of which has left scholars in something of a quandary. Malcolm Bell, the longtime director of excavations at Morgantina, continues to find no valid archeological evidence that the cult statue came from the site. He spent part of the past summer interviewing local residents, several of whom have lived in direct view of Morgantina for decades; he didn't find any clear indication of a major statue coming to light. Bell also doubts that the statue depicts Aphrodite. Citing the figure's extraordinary windblown garments, which reveal the contours of her body, Bell believes that it is probably a depiction of Hera, Zeus's wife, on Mt. Ida. Hera was trying to seduce Zeus, in order to allow the Greeks to capture Troy. Such a statue, Bell suggests, would have been installed in a major temple in one of the larger Sicilian cities. "Until we know exactly where it came from, it will be impossible to identify the goddess with certainty," Bell told me. He is hoping that the mystery will be solved in the next two years, before the statue is permanently banished to Aidone.



With the Getty deal in hand, the Italian culture ministry has announced that it is withdrawing as a civil party in the case against True; to some, this suggests that the lawsuit was less about curatorial misdeeds than about coveted objects. In Athens, meanwhile, one of the charges that True trafficked Greek antiquities was thrown out in late November. And although the criminal case in Italy continues, Ferri has signalled that he hopes for a rapid conclusion—possibly as early as next spring—in which both sides can save face. "It will not be an acquittal," he predicted. Ferri also told me, "There's no reason to go on in the outrage against Marion True. The more the trial goes on, the more outrage. It's better to reach a judgment."

After the Greek raids, True and her husband contemplated selling the house on Paros, but their friends on the island have remained loyal, and they have reconsidered. When I arrived, they had just cut down some old bamboo that lined the driveway, and the cement was drying on a new wall in front of the house. True said, "It gives us the sense that we are reclaiming it, that we are invested in staying here."

The confiscated stone objects and architectural fragments, which remain in police custody, were in the house and were shown to a local archeology official when she bought it; old stones found on the island are often incorporated into Paros houses, and the official deemed them of too little value to require registration. Referring to a stone projecting from the living-room wall, True said, "This one they didn't dare take out, because the structural engineer said the whole house could fall down." Although True has not been charged in Greece with possession of the objects, they have been discussed in the Rome trial, as evidence that True herself was collecting antiquities. When I asked Ferri about this, he said, "It's *prova di contorno*"—information to adorn the edges of his case. "The Greek evidence is not strong enough, but it can have some impact before the court."

I asked True one afternoon whether her belief in the value of museums had changed. "I think it is very hard for people raised in a technological age to understand how individuals millennia ago achieved with their hands objects of unbelievable beauty," she said. "Why are we moved by a Cycladic idol? We don't even know what it means or what it was used for. You look at the gorgeous Harpist"—a renowned Getty idol—"and you say, 'The person who thought to create this out of a single block of marble with nothing but bronze and emery tools!' It hasn't been surpassed. There are other things that can be equally good, but it's never been surpassed in terms of artistic achievement. And a young child can walk into the institution today and see the beauty in it as much as somebody who knew why it was created six millennia ago.

"But if we don't show those things, and we don't interpret them, and we don't use them to educate people, what are they surrounded by? Plastic and bad design and things that have no aesthetic quality at all."

Throughout hours of questions about her trial and the charges against her, True was calm and collected. When I suggested that we go to a nearby museum to look at art, though, she became emotional. "I can't go to museums anymore," she said. ♦

LIFE AND LETTERS

DAY OF THE DEAD

Malcolm Lowry's mysterious demise.

BY D. T. MAX

Malcolm Lowry died in his cottage in the village of Ripe, in Sussex, late at night on June 26, 1957, or early the next morning. He was forty-seven years old. His wife, Margerie, found his body upstairs, on the floor of their bedroom. An autopsy revealed that Lowry, an alcoholic, had been drunk, and the doctor who examined the body found that he had swallowed a large number of barbiturates and had inhaled some half-digested food from his stomach. An inquest was held, at which a police officer, the Lowrys' landlady, and Margerie testified. The coroner ruled the fatality a "misadventure"—that is, an accident. Lowry had choked to death on his own vomit.

Lowry is known for his 1947 novel, "Under the Volcano," which chronicles the final hours of Geoffrey Firmin, an alcoholic Englishman living in Mexico, in the shadow of the Ixtacihuatl and Popocatepetl volcanoes. On November 1st, the Day of the Dead, Firmin, the former British consul, finds that his estranged wife, Yvonne, has come back to town. Paralyzed by his alcoholism, he drifts from cantina to cantina, considering ways to reclaim her; but he never acts. By nightfall, Firmin is dead in a ditch, shot by Mexican paramilitaries. "Volcano" fuses modernist and romantic sensibilities: the story is told from shifting points of view, and Firmin's daylong odyssey is borrowed from "Ulysses"; at the same time, Lowry's prose is fervent, laid down in unstable, looping sentences. Shortly before his death, the consul sees on a house an inscription that reads "*No se puede vivir sin amar*"—"One cannot live without love." Lowry, in a 1946 letter to Margerie's family, wrote, " 'Volcano' 's theme: 'only against death does man cry out in vain.' " Dawn Powell wrote soon after the book's publication, "In 'Under the Volcano' you love the author for the pain of his overwhelming understanding."

Lowry began writing "Volcano" in his late twenties. The writing took four drafts and almost a decade. In his early attempts, he was more interested in seeing how many images and symbols he could embed in the text than in creating lifelike characters. It was only in 1939, when Lowry met Margerie, who was herself an aspiring writer, that the novel began assuming a coherent shape. Margerie suggested characters and plot turns, added sentences, and cut back Lowry's wordiness. She was a good editor, and the only person who could manage her husband's reckless temperament.

"Volcano" was published to broad acclaim. The critic Mark Schorer, reviewing the book in the New York *Herald Tribune*, wrote that few novels "convey so feelingly the agony of alienation, the infernal suffering of disintegration." Lowry was hailed as a successor to Joyce, who had died six years earlier. "Volcano" was a popular success, too—for a time, Lowry bragged, the book outsold "Forever Amber."

He soon fell apart. "Success," he wrote to Margerie's mother, "may be the worst possible thing that could happen to any serious author." According to Lowry's biographers—there have been six—his drinking, always prodigious, became incapacitating. He had persecution fantasies. At times, his delirium tremens was so severe that he could not hold a pencil. Lowry worked on many books in these years—he had in mind a multipart novel called "The Voyage That Never Ends," which would parallel the Divine Comedy, with "Volcano" in the position of the Inferno—but the manuscript that he cared most about was "October Ferry to Gabriola," a novel about the happiest phase of his marriage, in the nineteen-forties, when he and Margerie lived in a squatter's shack on an inlet north of Vancouver. Lowry could not make the novel come together; Margerie edited and suggested, Malcolm rewrote and rewrote, and the book slid sideways. They began fighting, in part because of their failure to tell the story of their happiness. They countered their frustrations with heavy doses of alcohol, prescription sedatives, tranquillizers, and stimulants—sodium amytal, phenobarbital, Benzedrine, Allonal, Nembutal, Soneryl. (Lowry joked that he and his wife should be known as "Alcoholics Synonymous.") But they could not inure themselves to the pain of their creative failure. Twice, during a trip to Europe, Lowry tried to strangle Margerie. Though she was a fraction of his size, she attacked him, too. Shortly before Lowry died, he told a psychiatrist whom he was seeing that either Margerie was going to kill him or he was going to kill her.

Margerie, who died in a Los Angeles nursing home in 1988, at the age of eighty-three, did not like to talk about the details of Lowry's death, but when she did she said that Lowry committed suicide. To most of their friends, that explanation seemed more likely than the official one, that he had accidentally swallowed too many pills. A lot had been going on in Lowry's life at the time. There was the agony of "October Ferry," which in its various drafts amounted to more than four thousand pages. In the months before his death, he had largely stopped drinking, under the care of his psychiatrist, who was encouraging him to be more independent from Margerie; for years, she had been lighting his cigarettes and even tying his shoelaces. He began to do things that he hadn't done in a long time, from taking the bus by himself to carrying his own money. These changes may or may not have destabilized him: it is not easy to make surmises about a man as grandly dysfunctional as Lowry. Fifty years ago, on July 3rd, he was buried in a corner of Ripe's thirteenth-century churchyard, which overlooks the South Downs. About a dozen mourners accompanied his wife. Margerie hoped to be buried by his side, but by the time she died

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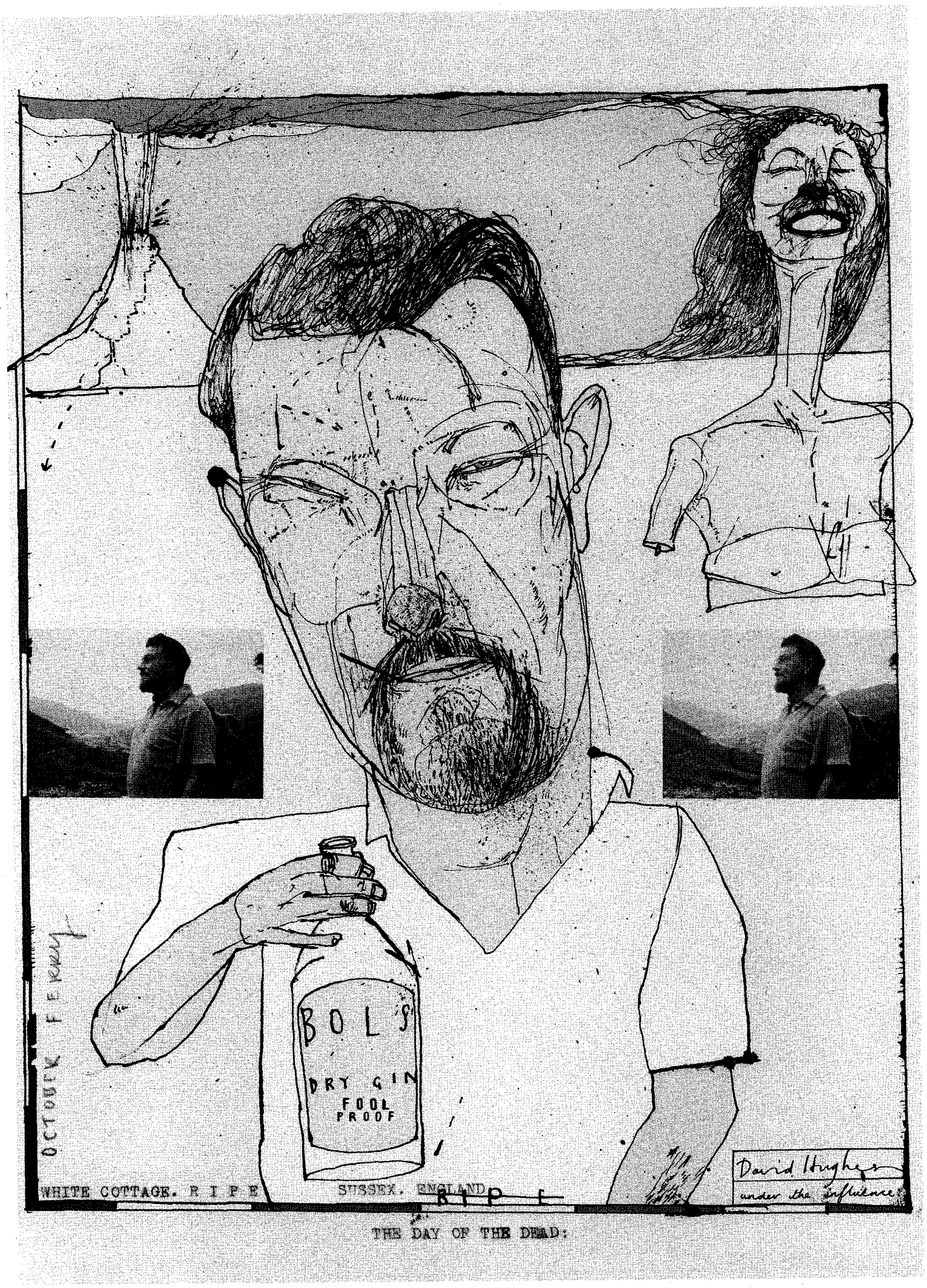

OCTOBER FERRY
BOLS
DRY GIN
FOOL PROOF
WHITE COTTAGE. RIPE SUSSEX. ENGLAND.
RIPE
David Hughes
under the influence
THE DAY OF THE DEAD:

After Lowry published "Under the Volcano," in 1947, he was hailed as a successor to Joyce. His wife, Margerie, edited the book.

the spot next to him had long since been taken; her body was interred forty yards away, at the other end of the churchyard.

In June, 1939, Clarence Malcolm Lowry met, by his own description, "a grand gal named Margerie" on Hollywood Boulevard, in Los Angeles. A friend of his had set them up. He took the bus; she drove. Lowry was twenty-nine years old, and separated from his first wife, Jan Gabrial—the inspiration for Yvonne in "Volcano." He and Gabrial had lived in Mexico for a year, trying to hold together their volatile marriage. Lowry, an Englishman with a Cambridge degree and a handsome allowance—his father was a wealthy cotton broker in Liverpool—believed his destiny was to be a great writer. But he had published only one book, six years earlier: "Ultramarine," a minor novel whose overexcited style owed a great deal to other writers, especially Conrad Aiken, his mentor. Many of Lowry's friends saw him as a figure of entertainment rather than as a serious artist—they enjoyed him most when he serenaded them with his ukulele. He had been working for nearly three years on "Volcano," which was based on his troubles in Mexico with Gabrial. The project clearly exceeded his skills, or at least his limited focus. Lowry was such a heavy drinker that, in a letter to Aiken, he described himself as a "Lear of the Sierras, dying by the glass in the Brown Derby."

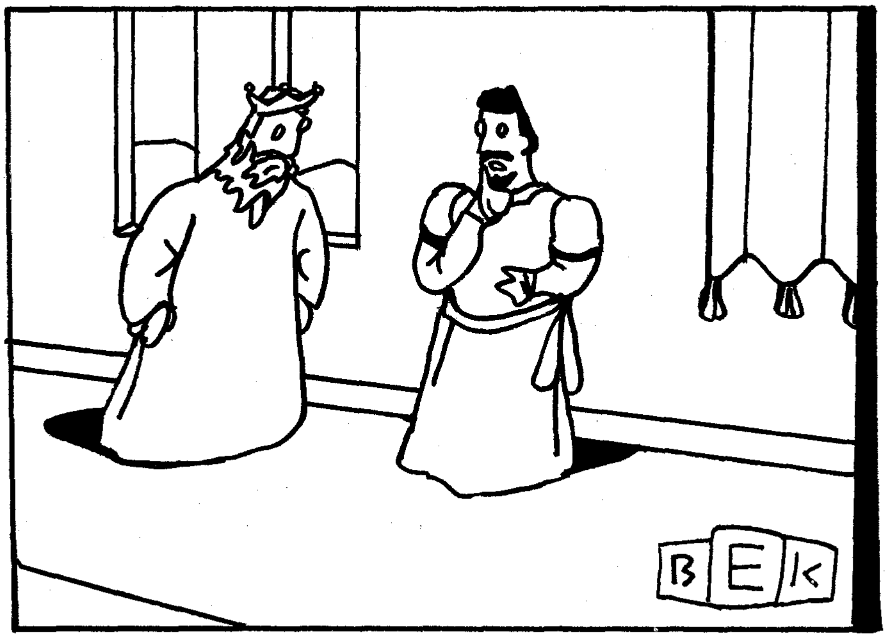
Margerie Bonner had tried her hand at murder mysteries but had not published any work. In the meantime, she had bit parts in several silent Westerns, and worked as the personal assistant to Penny Singleton, who played Blondie in movies based on the comic strip. Margerie's rapport with Lowry was immediate. Several years older, she had a toughness that he lacked; she wore furs and high heels and exuded glamour. (According to Gordon Bowker, the author of "Pursued by Furies," an incisive 1993 biography of Lowry, she had already been married, but she apparently did not tell Lowry.) Margerie saw Lowry as an exotic aristocrat. He was insecure sexually—he had an unusually small penis—but Margerie gave him confidence. He started calling himself El Leon ("the Lion") and gave her the pet name Miss Hartebeeste. Less than two months after they met, he wrote to declare his love: "The sensation of underground bleeding, of being torn up by the roots like a tree by a big wind—do you feel that? God, I do!"

Lowry was impractical in most ways, but he never met a woman without sizing her up as a typist and as an editor. In Margerie, he found both. Six weeks after they met, Lowry moved to Canada—his American visa had expired—and he asked her to follow him. She agreed. Margerie wanted Lowry to be a great writer almost as much as he did, and even in what he described as a "freezing bison-smelling attic in Vancouver" she got him to work. Lowry's sordid habits did not daunt her; she could drink nearly as much gin as he could. She told another Lowry biographer, Douglas Day, that she had once found him passed out in a Vancouver whorehouse, having sold all his clothes for liquor except his underwear. She demanded that the proprietor give Lowry something to wear; after he got dressed, she stood by him as he begged on the street for money to buy beer.

In 1940, Lowry and Margerie married, and she took his name. Lowry began working more intensely on "Volcano." His original manuscript, a short draft, had emerged from an incident that Lowry and Jan Gabrial had seen in Mexico. On a bus trip, they had come upon an Indian peasant lying by the road, apparently dying; the bus driver stopped, and one of the passengers got out and robbed the Indian. Lowry began to expand the story with Margerie's guidance. He wrote to Aiken, "We work together on it day and night." After Lowry wrote fresh material in longhand, Margerie typed it and offered criticism, a document they called the "margerieversion"; he then made revisions, and the cycle began again. Within six months, Lowry had produced a second draft.

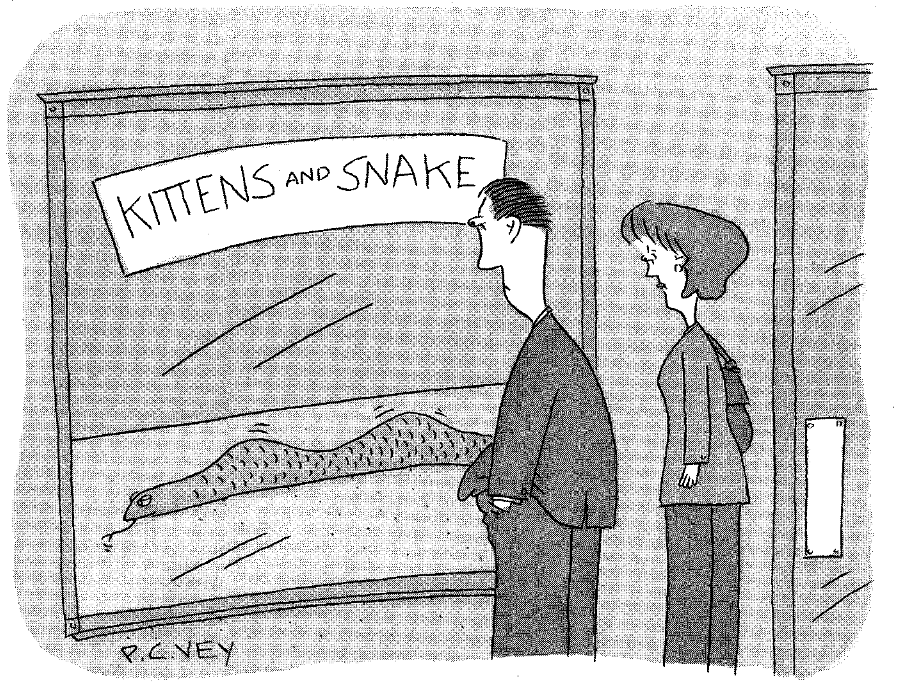
The new version of the novel was his most sustained and inventive fiction to date. His portrait of an unravelling drunk was unnervingly intimate. The manuscript had better pacing, thanks to Margerie, and it had an extensive overlay of symbolism, thanks to Lowry, who was an admirer of Baudelaire. "I felt that it is the first real book I've written," Lowry wrote to Aiken at the time. He credited his relationship with Margerie for the difference: "I'm more than glad I never got a chance to finish it without her."

The manuscript remained flawed. Much of the dialogue was wooden—"Get this so you can hear it," Lowry lectured himself in the margins—and the plotting was often heavy-handed. "I wonder what's happened to that *peón* we had to leave beside the road," one character comments in the first chapter. "Gosh, that was an ugly business." When Lowry's agent, Harold Matson, submitted the new version of "Volcano" to publishers, twelve in all, not one accepted it. Lowry collapsed, but with Margerie at his side he pulled through. Together, they wrote to Matson, admitting that the manuscript still needed work. "Youth plus booze plus



"Have you tried visualizing owning a goose that lays golden eggs?"

hysterical identifications plus vanity plus self-deception" was Lowry's explanation of what had gone wrong.



In August, 1940, they learned of a coastal village north of Vancouver, on the Burrard Inlet, called Dollarton, and rented a ramshackle cottage there. (Lowry was rich on paper, by the terms of a family trust set up in 1938, but the family gave him access only to the interest.) Built on land owned by the city, the house had no heat, electricity, or running water. Eight months later, they bought a nearby shack. After building a swimming pier with their own hands, they resumed work on "Volcano." They largely gave up drinking, and each morning, when Margerie typed Lowry's latest additions, he swam in the inlet, surrounded by seagulls and mergansers. They fetched their drinking water from a nearby stream, and local fishermen dropped buckets of crabs on their pier. Margerie was writing, too—she told Douglas Day that she had begun her first mystery novel, "The Shapes That Creep," to give Lowry something literary to assist on after "Volcano" was rejected.

According to Day, she finished the mystery in a few months, then quickly wrote another, a noirish tale called "The Last Twist of the Knife." At one point, an ingénue named Dora, who is falsely accused of murder, declares, "If you and your high-class friends think you can pin this on me because I'm poor and helpless and you're rich and important, you can just think again." Another character, Delight Dryden, braves a murder inquest, returning "the Coroner's benevolent gaze with artistically mingled fear and innocence." Scribners accepted both of Margerie's books for publication.

After Lowry's death, Margerie sold his papers to the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver. The "Volcano" manuscripts reveal the process of refinement that took place in Dollarton. The two rewrote many sentences over and over, as Margerie kept an eye out for Lowry's tics. On one page, she writes, " 'Terrifying'—watch this word Malc!," and crosses it out in the two places where it appears. On another page, Yvonne states, "We won't have the moon tonight." Margerie writes, "Watch this moon—you've got one in Chapter xii." In the margin of one version of the consul's last monologue, Lowry asks, "Is all this a bit muddled?" Margerie's response is not recorded, but the next draft is tighter. "A good, thorough agonizing cut," Lowry writes after Margerie has deleted a hokey moment in which a character imagines that he hears the consul lamenting his failure to reconcile with his wife: "If only I had not been so sure I were the stronger." In a 1950 letter to a fan, Lowry said of the revising process, "After a while it began to make a noise like music."

To the novel's tremendous benefit, Margerie helped Lowry reconsider its dismissive portrait of his first wife. Originally, Yvonne was the consul's daughter, a trifling character fixated on the needs of her equally callow boyfriend. "She looked at herself in the mirror," Lowry writes, soon after she arrives in Mexico to see her father. "She was a white satin nightgown. She was a robe, but where was the person?" In subsequent manuscripts, Margerie's handwriting can be seen changing Yvonne from daughter to wife; Margerie also helps shape the character, refining Yvonne's feelings about a past lover and amplifying her background, which is similar to her own—Yvonne is an actress who has appeared in "Western pictures." In the published version, Yvonne is closer to how Margerie saw herself: more woman than girl, more giving and forgiving. She is also able to think independently—parts of the novel are written from her point of view. Significantly, she is perhaps the only Lowry character who doesn't drink to excess.

The archive also indicates that Lowry and Margerie borrowed freely from each other's work. After they agreed that Yvonne should die, Margerie later recalled to biographers, she suggested that Yvonne could be trampled by a runaway horse. She was at work on a third novel, "Horse in the Sky," which contained such a death: "The horse suddenly . . . screamed in terror. He reared, reared again, then plunged wildly, in uncontrollable panic." Lowry liked the idea; near the end of "Volcano," Yvonne now "saw, by a brilliant flash of lightning, the riderless horse. . . . She heard herself scream as the animal turned towards her and upon her." Lowry, in a letter to his friend the novelist David Markson, explained, "We swop horses and archetypes to each other all the time."

At the end of 1944, Lowry finished the novel. In February, 1946, while he and Margerie were in Mexico, revisiting some of the locales of the book, he received acceptance letters from Jonathan Cape, a publisher in England, and from Reynal & Hitchcock, an American publisher, on the same day. To Jonathan Cape, he wrote, "We are wallowing in success, feeling in fact like starving men whose eyes are being stuffed with potatoes."

In February of 1947, as "Volcano" began receiving excellent reviews, Lowry and Margerie made a celebratory visit to New York. ("The city buzzes with your name," a friend wrote.) But for Lowry the trip was a horror. He had begun drinking again, and, when literary celebrities crowded to congratulate him at a party in his honor, he was too inebriated to respond. Dawn Powell, who was there, noted his distress in her diary. "He is the original Consul in the book," she wrote, "a curious kind of person—handsome, vigorous, drunk—with an aura of genius about him and a personal electricity almost dangerous, sense of demon-possessed." In another entry, she noted of Lowry, "Wife Marjorie [sic] in control."

For many of Lowry's literary friends, the publication rounds were their introduction to Margerie, and though they applauded her effect on him, they found her pretentious and overly invested in her association with an English genius. David Markson, one of Lowry's last surviving friends, told me, "She had a strange manner of speech. She was always saying things like 'May I have a little more milk in my Scotch, duckie?' Aiken came over one evening and afterward wrote me, 'Please don't invite me when she is here.' "

Already Lowry was worrying that he might never write another book as good as "Volcano." After the New York trip, he and Margerie briefly returned to Dollarton, where they worked on a story about a couple looking for a new home, based on a visit they had made in 1946 to an island in British Columbia called Gabriola. They submitted the story, "October Ferry to Gabriola," to their agent under a double byline; it did not sell, however. In November, 1947, they began a yearlong grand tour of Europe. Margerie had wanted the trip—she craved a larger stage than Dollarton provided. Lowry knew that abandoning his austere life was not good for him. "The French have enormous vitality," he wrote to Margerie's sister after visiting Paris. "But it's a quality I don't always admire. I like things rather sleepy."

A friend, spotting him drunk in London, asked him what was next, and Lowry joked that he was writing "Under Under the Volcano." He and Margerie began to quarrel. Lowry was by turns depressed and threatening: one night in the South of France, during a fight, he grabbed her by the neck; later, she found him a sanitarium outside Rome and took an adjoining room. Sneaking past a guard, he tried to strangle her again. At one point, he boasted in a letter to his French translator, he capped off nine whiskeys—six of them doubles—with the sedative Soneryl. During their European tour, Margerie wrote a letter to Albert Erskine, Lowry's American editor, claiming that Lowry was "becoming actively dangerous: first to himself & me but now more savage towards everyone who crosses him in any way." She got into the habit of giving him phenobarbital at night, to calm him.

Her journal entries, which are also at the University of British Columbia, reveal her anger. In an entry from December, 1947, she writes, "Altho he makes a great pretense of working . . . & of exercising & tries to fool me it is too obvious he is drinking all afternoon. . . . I had thought when I adored him as tho he were a god that love could survive anything but I begin to think that there are certain insults to *human dignity* that one should not survive." She had also begun wondering about the effect of their folie à deux on her own creativity: "I have stopped thinking of myself as an artist because the last years my whole consciousness has been so completely absorbed by Malc & his immediate desires & storms." Around the same time, she asked in her journal, "Is it conceivable that a man's weakness can be so strong, that such evil can overpower me & exhaust me to the point that I become evil too?"

They came back to Dollarton in January, 1949, and Lowry sobered up. He took up several projects, including "Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid," a fictionalized account of his 1946 trip to Mexico with Margerie. For a time, the collaboration between Lowry and Margerie grew more harmonious. They co-wrote a screenplay of Fitzgerald's "Tender Is the Night," which M-G-M expressed interest in. It was never produced, but Christopher Isherwood wrote Lowry to praise it. "It ought to be printed as well as played," he said.

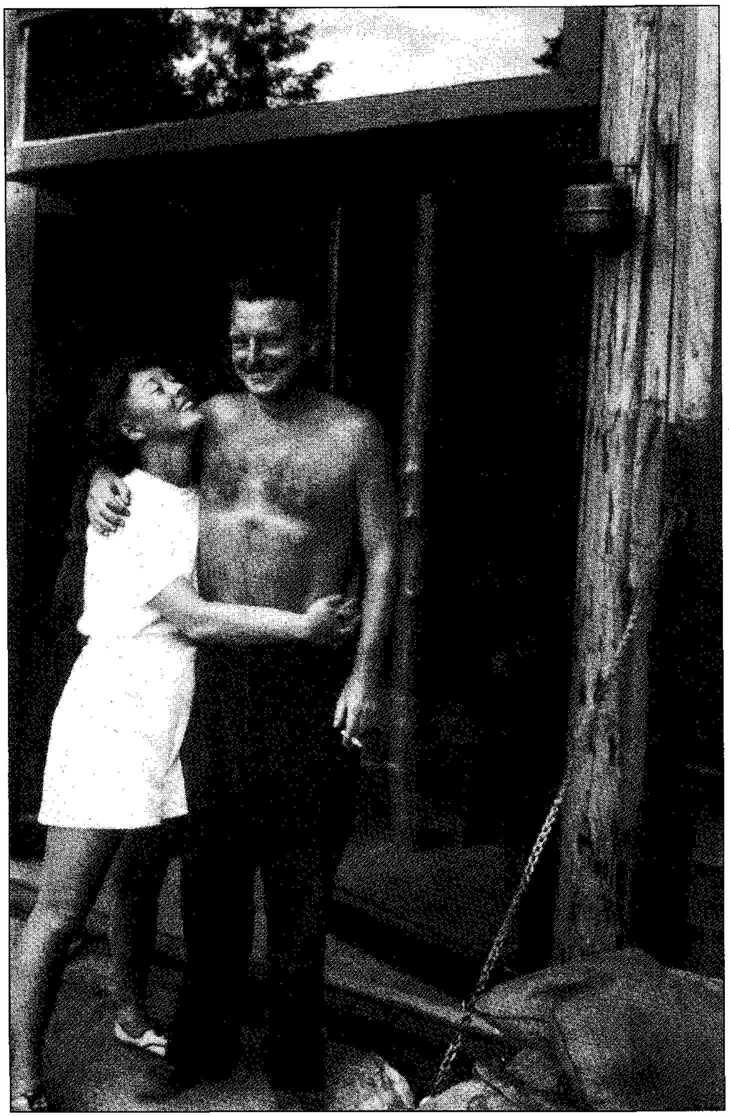
In 1950, Lowry returned to the "October Ferry" manuscript that he and Margerie had written. Around this time, the city government of Vancouver intensified an effort to evict the squatters of Dollarton, and Lowry's mood darkened. He expanded the draft of "October Ferry" into a short novel, and folded in an eviction motif. He wrote quickly, without the false starts that were typical of his writing. He thought that he had a clear vision for a novel. "I have completely rewritten it by myself and finally I'm extremely pleased with it," he wrote to Matson.

It was the last positive thing he would write about the book for seven years. In April, 1952, Erskine, who had moved to Random House, put him on retainer; but by August Lowry had become, as he wrote to Erskine, "half dead with discouragement." In the summer of 1953, in a letter to Erskine, he said that the challenge of writing the book was "a matter of life or death, or rebirth, as it were, for its author, not to say sanity or otherwise." The story kept rocking to and fro; the voyage to Gabriola went from real to metaphorical, then back again. "At my back I always hear Time's winged chariot changing gear," Lowry joked to Erskine.

Lowry and Margerie kept up their routine of swimming, eating crabs, and working on the book. They exchanged comments first in written form, then in conversation. But Lowry couldn't stop drinking, and the book's focus was changing daily—each new event in their lives was crammed into its pages. After Margerie gave him the omnibus edition of a writer named Charles Fort, whose work charted inexplicable coincidences, Lowry added to his book a chapter called "The Elements Follow You Around Sir," in which his alter ego stumbles upon Fort's book in a library. And, after they moved to a hotel in Vancouver during a cold winter, the hotel showed up in the draft. Between drafts three and seven, two time schemes emerged, and Lowry had trouble keeping them straight. The birth date of the couple's child, Tommy, fluctuates by four years. Lowry scribbled in the margin, "How old is Tommy? Check."

The collaborators began to despair. "The work has suffered," Lowry wrote to Erskine. "And so has she. And so, by God, have I. . . . This damned thing . . . has cost me more pains than all the 'Volcano' put together." As the Lowry archive reveals, his output had become a torrent of words flowing nowhere. Deletions grew more frequent. He was now rewriting sentences almost spastically. Vik Doyen, a Belgian academic who has made a definitive study of the "October Ferry" drafts, told me, "You feel sadness, the waste of possibilities and of genius."

At one point in the text of "October Ferry," the husband sees a prostitute at a newsstand. Lowry tries to capture her: "A woman seemingly out of the blue . . . with beautiful legs, eyed him, swaying her hips with aimless lust." He crosses this out, and substitutes, "A heavily painted young woman, evidently a premature noctambulist, wearing clothes & shoes so new they seemed just to have been stolen, eyed him, half humming." He crosses this out, too. Above such pages, Lowry often writes invocations, in small lettering, to the patron saint of lost causes: "St. Jude S.O.S."; "St. Jude Help me to think through this impossibility." At other times, he pleads to Turgenev, God, and "E. A. Poe."



Malcolm and Margerie Lowry in British Columbia, in 1947.

Margerie could not be as helpful to Lowry as she had been with "Volcano." The portrayal of Jacqueline, the wife, in "October Ferry" was two-dimensional, just as the initial conception of Yvonne in "Volcano" had been, but, this time, Margerie could not offer an outsider's perspective—Jacqueline was based on her. As Lowry grew angrier with himself, his protagonist grew angrier at his wife. In one draft, the wife complains about the "goddam shack" that is obsessing her husband, and pettily points out that, "for a woman," its primitive stove was terribly inconvenient. In the back-and-forth notes that accompany the passage, Margerie reminded Lowry that her initial response to Dollarton was more complicated. She proposes adding this nuance: "He recalled the tumble-down dirt & disorder of the 'Goddam shack' when they'd first seen it, & how under her hands it had become . . . beautiful; he recalled the vision, the enthusiasm, the love with which she had labored." Lowry ignored her; above this suggestion he writes, "phony, sentimental, bourgeois."

Around the same time, Lowry and Margerie were working on another autobiographical novel, "La Mordida." In one editorial exchange, their marital tension becomes overt. "I absolutely refuse to be made out such a fool," Margerie writes in a comment. "This is not true; why not tell the truth?" And, in a testy exchange over "October Ferry," Lowry writes to Margerie, "Try to imagine yourself *reading* the story in bed etc. etc.—occasionally at least as a reader rather than a writer." To which Margerie replies, with underscoring, "SEE MY NOTES." Lowry begins to respond to her criticisms with posturing. Of one scene from "October Ferry," in which a character dreams that he is venturing inside a dark cave, he writes, "With a little discipline, one of the high spots in English literature."

These disputes found no resolution in print or in life. Even in the relative calm of Dollarton, Margerie was worn out. She wrote to David Markson, Lowry's friend, that "October Ferry" had become a "blood sucking monster." (These words, which are in the archive, appear on a letter begun by Lowry that describes his struggle with "October Ferry," but he was apparently too drunk to finish it; Margerie did.) Soon, Dollarton would be gone, too. Bulldozers had knocked down most of the shacks. Albert Erskine had cancelled Lowry's contract with Random House, because, as he told the biographer Gordon Bowker, the draft of "October Ferry" sent to him by Lowry was "just about as tedious as anything I'd ever read." Margerie was growing tired of living twenty-five hundred miles away from New York—having published three novels, she felt that she and Lowry ought to have a more normal life, one that might help her career. (Her books had not sold especially well.) She felt that her health was also suffering in the damp and cold of Dollarton. And Lowry's drinking made him entirely dependent on her.

In 1954, Margerie persuaded Lowry that they had to leave Dollarton. They decided to move to Taormina, in Sicily—in the shadow of Mt. Etna, an idea that gave Lowry pleasure. On the way to Europe, they passed through New York and stayed with David Markson. Margerie and Markson left Lowry for a time in Markson's apartment, in Morningside Heights, with just a six-pack of beer. Upon their return, Lowry met them with what Markson remembers as a "sheepish" look: Lowry had drunk Markson's aftershave. Markson noticed that Margerie, in an attempt to take the edge off Lowry's hangovers, shoved vitamins down his throat before sending him to bed.

Margerie and Lowry sailed for Sicily. Lowry disliked Taormina and missed Dollarton. In Italy, he did not write a word of fiction; he barely wrote a letter. Margerie toured the sights, while Lowry drank and menaced her. At night, Margerie locked up the liquor in her room while Lowry begged for a drink outside. Sometimes she gave him Cognac and pentobarbital tablets to get to sleep. And she con-

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CHENEY

"Let's do the good cholesterol, bad cholesterol bit."

• •

tinued giving him vitamin pills when he got drunk. Their friends thought that the couple should break up—no one could understand how Margerie tolerated the relationship. Eventually, Italy proved too much even for Margerie. She complained of gallbladder problems. After eight months, they went to London. Margerie, suffering from nervous exhaustion, checked herself in to a hospital.

Lowry, in turn, was persuaded by friends to see a doctor for his alcoholism. At a hospital in Wimbledon, in November, 1955, he met a psychiatrist named Michael Raymond, whom he grew to trust. Raymond gave Lowry a course of "aversion therapy," which consisted of an injection of apomorphine followed by heavy drinking. The goal was for the patient to associate alcohol with the nausea brought on by the medicine. Raymond wanted Lowry to be near him after he was discharged, and in 1956 Margerie rented a house, known as the White Cottage, in the village of Ripe. After a relapse—caused, in part, by Margerie's continued drinking in front of her husband—and another, more intense course of aversion therapy that summer, Lowry returned to the cottage, determined to give up liquor for good.

In Ripe, Lowry sustained himself on Cydrax, a non-alcoholic cider that Raymond had recommended. He was able to work in earnest on "October Ferry" for the first time in three years, and soon boasted to Markson that he was back in the "Sacred or Budding Groove." In a genial mood, he described his rebirth to Dr. Raymond with some doggerel:

When to your brothel-monastery I came
I could not dress myself or open my own
mail . . .
When you suggested I should live at Ripe
I thought it very funny, it appealed to me
Recalling the initials R.I.P.
Requiescat in pace if you choose
Or rise if possible you challenged me.

Well I have risen, I am high and dry.
High on achievement, and as we rehearsed
Dry cider's little sibling slakes my thirst.
Its family resemblance keeps it near
Yet free from all the menaces accursed. . . .

I rise quite early and as you advised
I work to schedule and to my relief
I find Phrases will still come tumbling
through my mind
Though man's predicaments engage my
thoughts.

To Lowry's surprise, his improvement did not thrill Margerie. She began drinking more heavily, and spent most days sitting in the house, shaking and crying. In October of 1956, she checked herself back in to a hospital for a long course of heavy sedation meant to calm her nerves. Lowry called her therapy "her Rip Van Winkle snooze."

Before entering the hospital, Margerie had told their friend Dorothy Templeton that she'd had enough: she was putting aside all the money she could for the day she would leave Lowry. "She is absolutely callous towards ML," Templeton wrote her companion, Harvey Burt, in July, 1956. "Her idea of love is not mine or the average woman's."

During Margerie's hospital stay, Lowry wrote her letters about how happy he was in Ripe now; of working steadily again; of being the object of competition between their landlady and the vicar's housekeeper, who gave him his meals. He knew that his words did not make Margerie smile. He writes in his poem to Raymond, "As with the see-saw in the childhood rhyme / Now I am riding high poor Margerie is low." Lowry speculated to Markson that Margerie felt "robbed of the potential in-a-sense nurseable object." He did not know what to do about the change, and as a novelist part of him wanted simply to observe it. He wrote Markson, "The trouble is it is part of the plot of the book."

The village of Ripe has changed little in fifty years. A dozen houses, a roundabout, and a pub named the Lamb Inn remain its center. The narrow lanes out of the village still give way to the farmland of Sussex. At Lowry's grave, a terra-cotta marker bearing the last lines of "Volcano" now rests in front of his weathered headstone. The White Cottage, where Lowry died, is down a short pebble lane from the pub; a few months after the Lowrys arrived, in 1956, the proprietor banned them because Lowry was unruly.

In 2004, the *Times Literary Supplement* published a provocative article by Gordon Bowker, Lowry's most capable biographer, which revived some long-unanswered questions about Lowry's final days in Ripe. How trustworthy was the coroner's verdict of death by "misadventure," or Margerie's insistence that her husband had committed suicide? Why would Lowry, in good spirits and finally writing again, kill himself? "Volcano" was about to be reissued as a Vintage Classics paperback. And Hollywood directors were awakening to the book's cinematic potential; José Quintero had expressed particular interest. Jan Gabrial, Lowry's first wife, told an interviewer shortly before she died, in 2001, "Malcolm's death, to me, isn't quite explained."

In England, coroners' reports are usually sealed for seventy-five years. But Bowker had persuaded the Sussex coroner to give him Lowry's. The document contained some news: after Lowry's death, Margerie could not at first find the bottle for the pills that Lowry had swallowed, and only produced it for the police several hours later. The bottle had been stashed in one of his drawers. The coroner's report also recorded Margerie's claim that she had found the bottle with its top screwed on—meticulous behavior for a man as sloppy as Lowry. Even at the time of his death, friends had wondered about the challenge that unscrewing a top would have posed for Lowry. Harvey Burt, in a letter written four months after Lowry died, expressed doubt that he could have done it: "I can't understand. . . . His powers of coördination at such times were very low."

In the article, Bowker noted Margerie's habit of dosing Lowry with vitamin pills. He then offered a speculation: Lowry would not have noticed if what she fed him that night were not vitamins but sodium amytal, the barbiturate that helped kill him. He suggested that Margerie had developed a crush on a writer friend, Peter Churchill, a viscount and a recent widower. Finally, Bowker laid out an accusation of murder: "Margerie had the motive (hankering after Churchill), the means (the pill-feeding ritual) and the opportunity (the cottage after dark)."

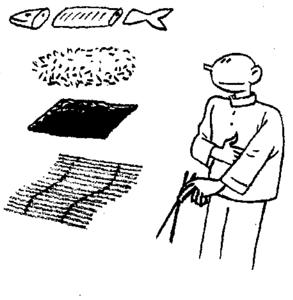
Bowker also reported that Margerie and Winnie Mason, the landlady, had both testified to the police that they had spent the evening chatting in Mason's cottage, next door. Later, however, they both said that Margerie had been at home with Lowry. (Margerie made this claim in a letter to Lowry's French translator, Mason in a 1966 BBC interview.) For Bowker, these statements suggested collusion.

Lowry scholars did not take offense at the murder theory when the *T.L.S.* published it. Many of them have been drawn to Lowry as much by the drama of his life as by his writing. On his birthday, they gather at Dollarton and drink gin. The possibility of foul play has only added zest to their work. Bowker's notion of a romantic motive did not strike them as convincing, though. By the fatal night, Margerie was so run-down by Lowry that she could barely get out of bed; she was in no state to take a lover. For some Lowry scholars, this became the point: the idea of murdering Lowry was not just conceivable but almost justifiable. Lowry had not only used Margerie's talent; he had taken over her life. Then, after abusing and exploiting her for eighteen years, he had grown weary of her. Recently, I asked a leading Lowry scholar, Sherrill Grace, a professor at the University of British Columbia, who edited the two-volume edition of Lowry's collected letters, if Margerie murdered Lowry. "Gordon's right," she told me, then said of Margerie, "She should have done it sooner!"

The White Cottage is now owned by a farmer and his wife. When I knocked on their door this summer, they invited me to walk around the house. The cottage is dark and oppressively small, though a previous owner had installed a skylight in the kitchen. The owners had not read "Under the Volcano," but they knew about Lowry. We walked through a room with exposed wood beams and a hearth. "This was Lowry's study," the husband told me, showing me the room in which Lowry had wrestled with "October Ferry." The murder rumor had recently reached them—some visiting Japanese academics had mentioned it.

By the time the police arrived at the White Cottage on the morning of June 27th, Lowry had likely been dead for hours. He lay on his back by the side of Margerie's bed, the rug rumpled beneath him. According to the coroner's report, a transcript of which Bowker shared with me, a "quantity of sliced cold cooked meat" was by Lowry's arm. On the other side of the bed was a broken orange-squash bottle and a broken gin bottle. There were glass splinters on Lowry's chest and blood on his left palm. Two chairs had been thrown: an easy chair lay on its side by the window; a kitchen chair had been smashed to pieces.

After Margerie found Lowry's body, a constable named William Lord, from the nearby town of Selmeston, took her statement and that of Mason, the landlady. Margerie also spoke of what happened that night to Douglas Day. Lowry, she said, had once again fallen off the wagon. With the Lamb Inn off limits, they had walked to the Yew Tree pub in Chalvington, a mile away, where they drank beer. (The bartender recalled Margerie crying.) Lowry then bought a bottle of gin, over her objections, saying that it would cheer her up—he told the bartender that she was sad over their lost Dollarton home—and they walked back to Ripe on the country lane. They were planning to listen to the radio. Lowry began drinking from the bottle, getting wilder. Margerie said that after a BBC concert—Leopold Stokowski conducting Stravinsky—Lowry began "raving." He turned up the radio. Margerie, who had been downstairs making supper, came up and turned it down, not wanting to disturb Winnie Mason next door.



According to the police report, Lowry struck Margerie. She grabbed the gin bottle and broke it to keep him from drinking it. Lowry then brandished the broken bottle and chased Margerie downstairs; she recalled to Douglas Day that her husband had "a fiendish look on his face." She took refuge in Mason's house. She told Day that she then took a sleeping pill—she did not explain how she came to have one with her—and went to sleep. (Both she and Lowry were heavy users of sleeping pills; Lowry called them his "pink things." They both had prescriptions for sodium amytal. In October, 1956, Lowry wrote Margerie of Dr. Raymond's appearing at his door in Ripe, "bearing, in hand like a malt-shovel, a half-dozen sodium amytals to tide me over.")

Lowry's death made the regional paper, the Brighton *Argus*, with the headline "SHE BROKE GIN BOTTLE—FOUND HUSBAND DEAD." All the same, the Sussex police did not press an investigation. Lowry had no connections in the area. No one knew who he was. (The *Argus* called him "Clarence Lowry," and no other British paper recorded his death.) Locals did not like him; Roy Medhurst, the last living Ripe resident who knew Lowry, told me that Lowry was a "drunken yob" and said that his death left "some people relieved."

The inquest was routine. Constable Lord told the coroner what he saw. Winnie Mason, in her deposition, recalled Margerie showing up at her door, distraught, and claimed that Margerie had not gone out after retiring to a camp bed that she had made for her. If she had, Mason insisted, "I would most certainly have heard her, being a light sleeper, and also my dog would have barked."

Margerie at first told friends that

SHRIKE

How brightly you whistle, pushing the long soft
feathers on your rump down across the branch,
like the apron of a butcher, as you impale a cricket
on a meat hook deep inside my rhododendron.
Poor cricket can hardly stand the whistling,
not to speak of the brownish-red pecking
(couldn't you go a little easy?), but holds up
pretty good in a state of oneiric pain.
Once, long ago, when they were quarrelling about money,
Father put Mother's head in the oven.
"Who are you?" it pleaded from the hell mouth.
Upstairs in the bathroom, I drank water right out of the tap,
my lips on the faucet. Everything was shaking and bumping.
Earth was drawing me into existence.

—*Henri Cole*

there had been a suicide note but then said that there wasn't. The lack of a note surprised them. Alcohol would hardly have stopped his pen—he wrote while drunk all the time. And he was someone for whom written words accompanied nearly every moment of life; he even scrawled observations as he sat drunk in bars. Some four hundred jotted notes to Margerie are in the British Columbia archive—messages from El Leon to Miss Hartebeeste. "Lowry was always saying, 'Make notes,'" Markson told me. Lowry's despair was always part theatre; and, for such a person, self-destruction practically demanded documentation.

The coroner did not call Lowry's psychiatrist, Dr. Raymond, who, far from considering Lowry "incurable," as Margerie told the police, thought that he was getting better. Angry that Margerie had kept drinking in Lowry's presence, he later refused to treat her for her emotional exhaustion. He also thought that Lowry's spiritual beliefs precluded suicide. The coroner failed to call members of Lowry's family—he had three older brothers. Had he done so, they might have told him that they were suspicious of Margerie; in an unpublished reminiscence, one of the brothers called her "the very material Margerie," adding that the Lowrys, who thought she wore too much jewelry, referred to her as Bangles. Nor did the coroner speak to Dorothy Templeton and Harvey Burt, the couple who knew the Lowrys best. They had spent their summers near them in Dollarton for years; more recently, Templeton had visited them in Sicily, where Lowry had confided to her that Margerie had complained until he named her as his sole beneficiary. (In 1945, Lowry's father died, leaving a fortune that was the equivalent of ten million dollars.) In a letter, Templeton wrote of the couple, "I'm sure if she knew he would never write again she would hope for widowhood." In another letter, she recalled watching them argue one night in Taormina, when "all of a sudden Marg turned into a ferocious maniac" and beat up the enormous, cowering, and incapacitated Lowry. And on another occasion, she wrote, Margerie broke Lowry's nose in a fight in "the *corso,* with hundreds looking on." (Margerie told Douglas Day that this incident never occurred.)

"They think I murdered him," Margerie told Burt and Templeton when they came to Ripe to help her, shortly after Lowry's death. Fairly or not, Burt and Templeton began to suspect Margerie, too. Publicly, she seemed devastated, but they found her oddly energized in private. According to Bowker, to whom they spoke extensively, they thought that Margerie was playing the distraught widow.

In Ripe, I saw that Winnie Mason's cottage was so close to the Lowrys' that they almost formed one building. Margerie could easily have fled Lowry in his drunken rage, then returned home later for a pill. Perhaps, as she looked around for the sodium amytal, a decade of frustration caught up with her. Maybe she went to Lowry and told him that he'd better start preparing for his hangover with some vitamins. Her conciliatory manner would not have surprised him; their battles were often followed by more tender exchanges. Margerie, herself soothed by the barbiturate, could have returned to bed at Mason's several minutes before the pills would have knocked Lowry to the floor. The next day, Margerie would have discovered the body, just as she said she had.

Lowry's death will always remain a mystery. Even if his body were exhumed, it would offer no insight into how the barbiturates had entered his system. Maybe Margerie meant only to make Lowry sleep, as she had many times before—she had been drinking, too, and might have given too many pills by mistake. David Markson said of the murder theory, "What do I think? What I think is he was a drunk and then he died."

New York Review Books has just published a compilation of Lowry's work, including portions of the posthumous books, which have long been out of print. "The Voyage That Never Ends," as the volume is called, shows Lowry's extraordinary imagination and his ability to pull the English language in whatever direction he wanted to go. A typical aphorism: "The lightning, a good writer, did not repeat itself." And this description of a storm at sea: "One could see, as the ship lurched . . . great doctor of divinity's gowns of seas furling to leeward, the foam like lamb's wool." But the anthology does not change the impression that Lowry was a writer who brought only one significant book to fruition.

"Under the Volcano"—his "ultima thule of the spirit," as he called it—contains a remarkable death scene, and some of the language evokes Lowry's own. The Mexican paramilitaries close in on the consul. One pulls out a pistol and shoots him, then shoots him twice more, and the world becomes a giant symbol of despair: "Suddenly he screamed, and it was as though this scream were being tossed from one tree to another, as its echo returned, then, as though the trees themselves were crowding nearer, huddled together, closing over him, pitying." This is pure Baudelaire. But, at the moment when the consul sees the gun firing, Lowry sees things more plainly: "At first the Consul felt a queer relief. Now he realized he had been shot. He fell on one knee, then, with a groan, flat on his face in the grass. 'Christ,' he remarked, puzzled, 'this is a dingy way to die.' "

After Lowry's death, Margerie never married again, and never published another of her own books. She moved back to Taormina, while Lowry's family dragged its feet over her inheritance. After she threatened to move in with them, they released a small sum. "For all they care, I can starve in Sicily," she wrote Dorothy Templeton, four months after Lowry's death. "I am dead or wish I were," she wrote in another postcard. She had already begun to look for publishable work in the trunk of manuscripts that Lowry left behind.

Soon, most of Lowry's friends and family dropped her. "I haven't heard one bloody word from anybody in England since I left," she wrote Templeton and Burt in 1959. (When I met Lowry's great-nephew Jeremy Lowry in England this summer and asked about the family's opinion of Margerie, he said, "She was never referred to.") Margerie settled in Los Angeles and dedicated herself to her husband's legacy. Her agent, Peter Matson, Harold Matson's son, remembers her as a small, intense, heavy-drinking woman who "seemed to live very much in the past." She wrote Burt in 1971, "Malc is hotter than ever in Paris and *Le Monde* gave two full pages to him last fall," but noted a few months later that she warded off her "grief and troubles with vodka, mixed with ice and plain water."

The reputation of "Under the Volcano" kept rising with the years. Critics extolled it as the last great modernist novel, and scholars worked to unweave its web of symbols. "The doctorates are piling up all over the U.S. and Canada," Margerie wrote to Burt and Templeton in 1965. In 1998, the board of the Modern Library ranked it No. 11 of the best hundred books of the twentieth century. Gabriel García Márquez has said that it was probably the novel that he had read the most often in his life.

Every four or five years until her death, Margerie published a novel or story collection that she had retrieved from the unpublished part of the "bolus," as Lowry called his writing. Most scholars did not think that these works were anywhere near the level of "Volcano," and wondered if Margerie was truly fulfilling Lowry's wishes in offering them to the public. "I told Margerie not to publish them," David Markson remembers. Margerie told Douglas Day that she found such criticisms ridiculous. In a letter, she said, "I certainly wrote plenty of lines, and scenes, when I was editing 'The Forest Path' and 'Through the Panama' "—stories that Lowry completed—"both of which have received high praise and people write me about them all the time." She was keeping alive her side of their collaboration—the selecting and the shaping—even though the man who sometimes rejected and improved upon her ideas was silent.

In 1970, Margerie finally published "October Ferry to Gabriola." A short afterword, titled "About the Author," claimed that Margerie had based her edit on "an almost complete revision" that Lowry had been working on just before his death. This was wishful thinking: there had been no such revision, just thousands of pages of a half-dozen versions, none close to complete. Margerie pulled sections from different drafts and gave the book the happy ending that she had been pressing for: the Lowry stand-in realizes that his nostalgia for the squatter's shack is damaging his marriage. He cuts his ties to the past and the couple moves to Gabriola to begin life again. Margerie did not include any of the material from Lowry's final burst of inspiration—the pages written in Ripe, largely without her, which might have marked a creative renewal for him.

During this time, Lowry produced fascinating additions to "October Ferry"—almost a hundred pages, written in his tiny hand, in which he began to examine what he called the "alcoholocaust" of his life, and the way that drinking had affected his art. He wrote about his aversion treatment, and clearly expected to integrate this experience into the story of Ethan Llewelyn, the protagonist of "October Ferry." His talent for imagery is apparent when he merges the nautical and the medical to describe "a psychiatric ward at noon, waiting for the doctors to pass through, with two tall nurses at anchor." He had also put wholesale into the draft various letters of apology that he had written to Margerie over the years. None of this ambitious work was finished, but it pointed to a novel very different from the ones that Lowry had written before, one that might have taken him not under "Under the Volcano" but beyond it.

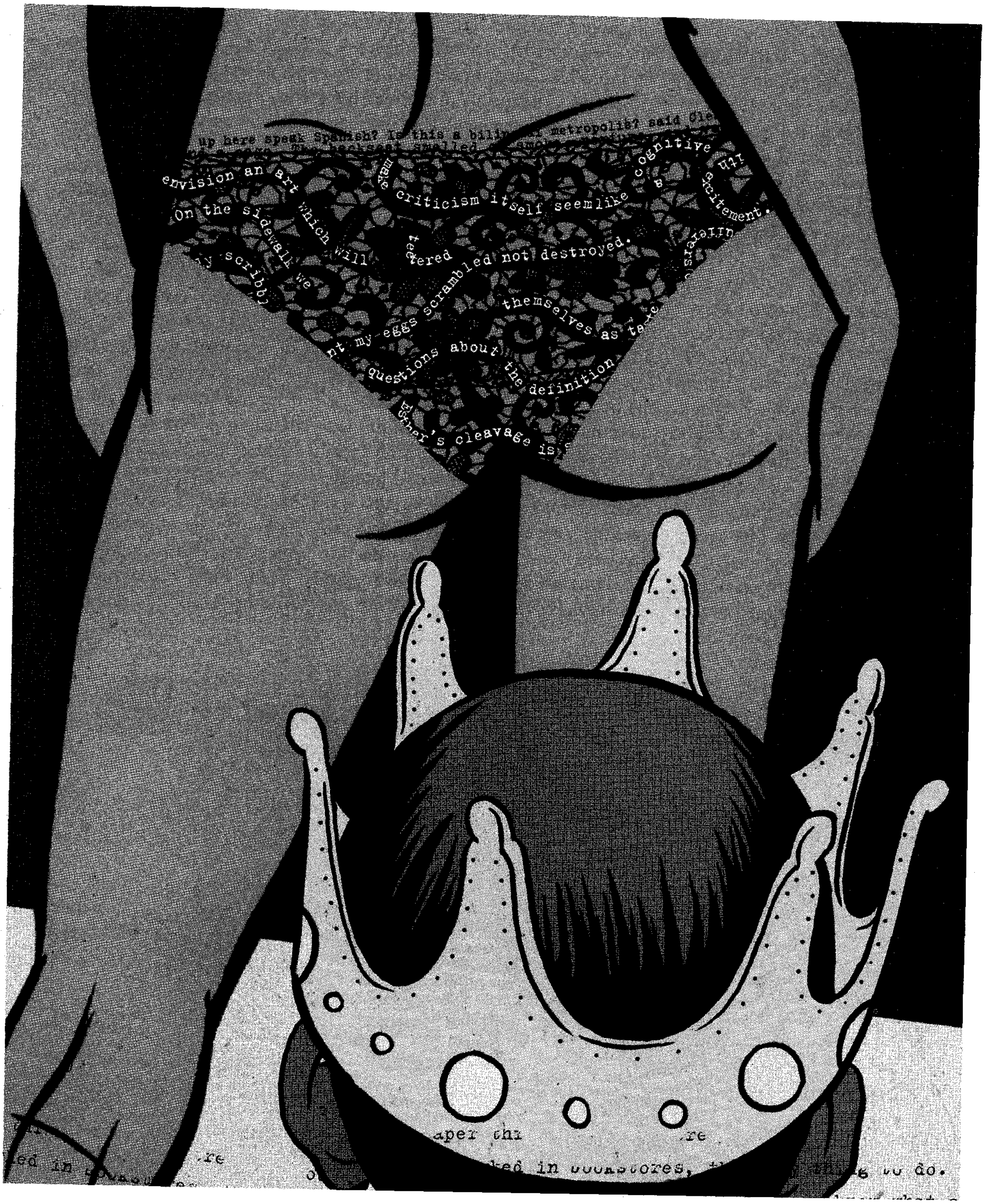
When Margerie consigned these manuscripts to the University of British Columbia, she added notes in her looping script. "Rambling notes," one said. "Seems like a dissertation on alcohol." Another said, "Nothing useful here." ♦

"You're wondering why I've called you here."

FICTION

THE KING OF SENTENCES

BY JONATHAN LETHEM


up here speak Spanish? Is this a bilingual metropolis? said Cle
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Esther's cleavage is
ed in bookstores,
thing to do.

This was the time when all we could talk about was sentences, sentences—nothing else stirred us. Whatever happened in those days, whatever befell our regard, Clea and I couldn't rest until it had been converted into what we told ourselves were astonishingly unprecedented and charming sentences: "Esther's cleavage is something to be noticed" or "You can't have a contemporary prison without contemporary furniture" or "I envision an art which will make criticism itself seem like a cognitive symptom, one which its sufferers define to themselves as taste but is in fact nothing of the sort" or "I said I want my eggs scrambled not destroyed." At the explosion of such a sequence from our green young lips, we'd rashly scribble it on the wall of our apartment with a filthy wax pencil, or type it twenty-five times on the same sheet of paper and then photocopy the paper twenty-five times and then slice each page into twenty-five slices on the paper cutter in the photocopy shop and then scatter the resultant six hundred and twenty-five slips of paper throughout the streets of our city, fortunes without cookies.

We worked in bookstores, the only thing to do. Nobody who didn't—and that included every one of our customers—knew what any of the volumes throbbing along those shelves was worth, not remotely. Nor did the bookstores' owners. Clea and I were custodians of a treasury of sentences much bigger on the inside than on the outside. Though we mostly handled the books only by their covers (or paged briefly through to ascertain that no dunce had striped the pages yellow or pink with a Hi-Liter), we communed deeply with them, felt certain that only we deserved to abide with them. Any minute we'd read them all cover to cover, it was surely about to happen. Meanwhile, every customer robbed us a little. At the cash registers we spoke sentences tailored to convey our disdain, in terms so subtle it was barely detectable. If our customers blinked a little at the insults we embedded in our thank-yous, we believed, they just might be worthy of the marvels their grubby dollars entitled them to bear away.

JOHN RITTER AND ROGO

We disparaged modern and incomplete forms: gormless and garbled jargon, graffiti, advertising, text-messaging. No sentence conveyed by photons or bounced off satellites had ever come home intact. Punctuation! We knew it was holy. Every sentence we cherished was sturdy and Biblical in its form, carved somehow by hand-dragged implement or slapped onto sheets by an inky key. For sentences were sculptural, were we the only ones who understood? Sentences were bodies, too, as horny as the flesh-envelopes we wore around the house all day. Erotically enjambed in our loft bed, Clea patrolled my utterances for subject, verb, predicate, as a chef in a five-star kitchen would minister a recipe, insuring that a soufflé or sourdough would rise. A good brave sentence ("I can hardly bear your heel at my nape without roaring") might jolly Clea to instant climax. We'd rise from the bed giggling, clutching for glasses of cold water that sat in pools of their own sweat on bedside tables. The sentences had liberated our higher orgasms, nothing to sneeze at. Similarly, we were also sure that sentences of the right quality could end this hideous endless war, if only certain standards were adopted at the higher levels. They never would be. All the media trumpeted the Administration's lousy grammar.

But we were chumps and we knew it. As makers of sentences we were practically fetal, beneath notice, unlaunched, fooling around in our spare time or on somebody else's dime. Nobody loved our sentences as we loved them, and so they congealed or grew sour on our tongues. We barely glanced at our wall-scribblings for fear of what a few weeks or even hours might expose in our infatuations. Our photocopied fortune slips we'd find in muddy clogs in storm drains, tangled with advertising flyers, unheeded. Our manuscripts? Those were unspeakable secrets, kept not only from the world but from each other. My pages were shameful, occluded everywhere with xxxxx's of regret. I scurried to read Clea's manuscript every time she left the apartment but never confessed that I even knew it existed. Her title was "Those Young Rangers Thought Love Was a Scandal Like a Bald White Head." Mine was "I Heard the Laughter of the Sidemen from Behind Their Instruments."

Others might hail kings of beer or burgers—we bowed to the King of Sentences. There was just one. We owned his titles in immaculate firsts and tattered reading copies and odd variant editions. It thrilled us to see the pedestrian jacket copy and salacious cover art on his early mass-market paperbacks: to think that he'd once been considered fodder for dime-store carrousels! The newest editions of the titles he'd allowed to be reprinted (four early novels had been suppressed from republication) were splendidly austere, their jackets, from the small presses that published him now, bearing text only, no graven images. The progress of his editions on our shelf was like a cartoon of evolution, a slug crawling from the surf to become a mammal, a monkey, and then at last a hairless noble fellow gazing into the future.

The King of Sentences gave no interviews, taught nowhere, condescended to appear at no panels or symposia. His tastes, hobbies, and heartbreaks were unknown, and we extrapolated them from his books at our peril. His digital footprint was pale: people like that didn't care about people like him. Google, for what it was worth, favored a famous painter of wildlife scenes—beaver dams, heron hideaways—with the same name. The King of Sentences only wrote, beavering away himself on a dam of quintessence, while wholly oblivious of public indifference and of a sales record by now likely descending to rungs occupied by poets. His author photograph, identical on twenty years of jackets and press clippings until it stopped circulating at all, arrested him somewhere in the mid-sixties, turtlenecked, holding a cocktail glass forever. His last cocktail, maybe.

In the same loft where we entangled, Clea and I drove ourselves mad reading the King of Sentences' books aloud, by candlelight, when we ought to have been sleeping. We'd tear the book from each other's hands for the pleasure of running his words like gerbils in the habitrails of our own mouths. We'd alternate chapters, pages, paragraphs, finally sentences, at last agree to read him in unison. He could practically hear us as we intoned his words, we'd swear they reached his ears. But not really. Really, we were vowing to ourselves and to each other that we'd make a day trip

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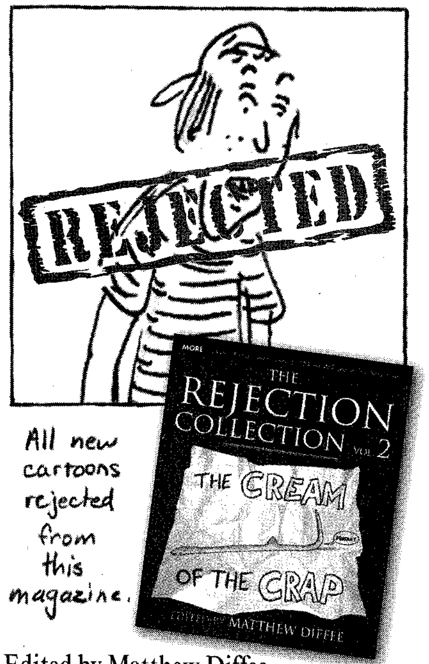
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in search of the King of Sentences, that we'd flush him out, propel ourselves into his company and confidence, buoy him with our love and bind ourselves (and our secret manuscripts, oh yeah!) to his greatness. We each had what the other needed, of this we were positive. Maybe we'd watch him write. Maybe he'd watch us dance, or fuck, who knew? We'd buy him lunch. He was surely mortal enough for lunch. He'd want us at least for lunch.

He lived, we'd learned, north of the city, having drawn from his days as a Greenwich Village flâneur whatever inspiration he'd needed, and departed around the time of that last photograph and cocktail. (We figured that his departure from the narrow town house on Jane Street marked an expiration date on anything west of Second Avenue as an authentic locale.) Minimal detective work pinned him to a P.O. box in Hastings-on-Hudson—how clever and coy he had been to find a place-name that was itself, with the mere insertion of an apostrophe, a sentence, and a faintly lascivious one, too. So it was that we knew he'd summoned us to his hiding place: Clea could play Hudson, and I'd be Hasting.

We sent a postcard warning, addressed to his box. No return address, so he couldn't refuse. No fancy sentences, fearing his judgment of those. Just fragments: "coming in two weeks," "get ready," "can't wait to meet in person" (as if we'd already met on other planes, for we had). The appointed day came upon us like a sickness, and though each in our privacy might have preferred to stay in bed and sweat it out we couldn't have looked each other in the eye if we hadn't staggered out of doors, to the subway, up to Grand Central Terminal. During the short ride we held hands, fever-sweaty at the palms. Exiting Metro-North's Hastings-on-Hudson station under a thundercloud-clotted sky, we found ourselves the sole travellers not claimed by family members waiting in Subarus or bleeping their driver-side doors unlocked as they crossed the parking lot with cell phones clammed to their ears. The train continued on behind us, and the station depopulated as if neutron-bombed.

"This is the town of the King of Sentences."

"This little town."

"He could be watching us now, don't act stupid. With a telescope."

We blundered along something called Main Street, seeking the post office, until a passerby directed us to Warburton Avenue. Inside the mediocre lobby we staked out a position near the numbered boxes, innocuously pretending to screw up our change-of-address forms so that we had to start over again a dozen times. His box, which we surveilled with peripheral vision only, pulsed with risk and possibility—our own postcard had been handled there, a precursor to this encounter.

Losing patience, we sidled to the main counter. "What time on the average day does the box holder typically, you know, pick up?"

"Box mail goes up at ten-thirty."

"Right, sure, but mostly when do citizens appear and begin to gather it up, take it to their private homes?"

"Whenever they care to."

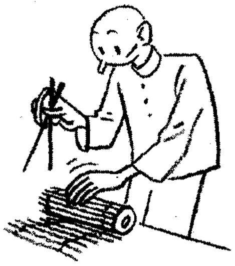
"Sure, right, this is America, isn't it?"

"Sure is."

"Thank you."

We resumed charades with the chained pen. Two, three, five, eight, eighteen Hastings-on-Hudsonians lumbered in to check their boxes, sort circulars into recycling bins, greet the postmistress, and trade coins for stamps, each of comically tiny denominations. Everyone in this hamlet, it seemed, had just found a sixteen- or twenty-three-cent stamp in a dusty drawer, and had chosen today to supplement it up to viability using car-seat nickels and pennies.

Yet somehow between transactions the postmistress had snuck away for a tattling phone call, or so we surmised from the blinking patrol car that now swept up in front of the P.O. Into the lobby strode a cowboyesque figure, a man, late-fiftyish, wearing a badge in the manner of a star, lean, and, when he spoke, laconic. Clea read my mind, say-



ing, "You the sheriff in these parts?"

"Chief of Police."

"Not the Sheriff of Hastings-on-Hudson?"

"No, ma'am, there isn't one. Can I ask what you're doing here?"

"Waiting."

"Have you folks got postal business today?"

"No," I said. "But we've got business with someone who might have postal business, if that's O.K."

"I suppose it might be, sir, but I'm forced to wonder who we're talking about."

"The King of Sentences."

"I see. You wouldn't happen to be the authors of a certain unsigned and borderline-ominous postcard?"

"Might happen to be, though there was hardly ominous intent."

"I see. And now you're waiting, I'm guessing, for the addressee."

"In the manner of free Americans in a federally controlled public space, yes. We checked with the postmistress."

"I see. You mind if I wait a bit myself?"

"By definition we can't."

Soon enough he appeared. The King of Sentences, unmistakably, though withered like a shrunken-apple fetish of the noble cipher in the photograph. He wore a gray sweatshirt and caramel corduroys with the knees and thighs bald, like a worn radial tire. Absurd black Nikes over gray dress socks. Hair white and scant. Eyes tiny and darting. They darted to the not-sheriff, who nodded minimally. The King nodded back with equal economy.

We collapsed, as planned, to our knees, conveying the beautiful anguish of our subjection to the sole King of Sentences—bowed heads, fingers wriggling as if combing the air for particles of his greatness. A chapter of "I Heard the Laughter of the Sidemen from Behind Their Instruments," secreted in the waistband of my underwear, buckled as I knelt there. The King stood inert, if anything sagged slightly. The Chief turned and shook his head, a little appalled.

"You O.K.?" he asked the King.

"Sure. Let me talk to them a minute."

"Anything you say." The law went outside, to stand and take a cigarette beside his cruiser. He watched us through the window. We nodded and waved as we scrambled back to our feet.

"Who sent you?" the King said.

"You, you, you," Clea said. "It was you."

"We weren't so much sent as drawn," I said. "You gave us the gift of your work, and now we're here, a gift in return."

"Take us," Clea said.

"No, thank you," the King said. His eyes shifted nervously from Clea, settling on me.

"We annointed you the King of Sentences," I told him. "We're the ones who did that. Nobody else." I didn't want to bully him with news of how scarcely his name circulated, how stale and marked-down the assembly of his hardcovers on used-bookstore shelves.

"I didn't tell you to come."

"No, but you are responsible for our presence."

"Let me be clear. I have nothing for you."

"Take us home."

"Not on your life."

"We came all this way."

He shrugged. "When's the next train back?"

The sentences that emerged from his mouth were flayed, generic, like lines from black-and-white movies. I tried not to be disappointed in this stylistic turn. He had something to teach us, always.

"We don't care. We don't have tickets. We came for you."

"I don't fraternize. This kind of intrusion is the last thing I need."

"Lunch," I begged. "Just lunch."

"I eat only what my housekeeper prepares. A disproportion of sodium could murder me at this point."

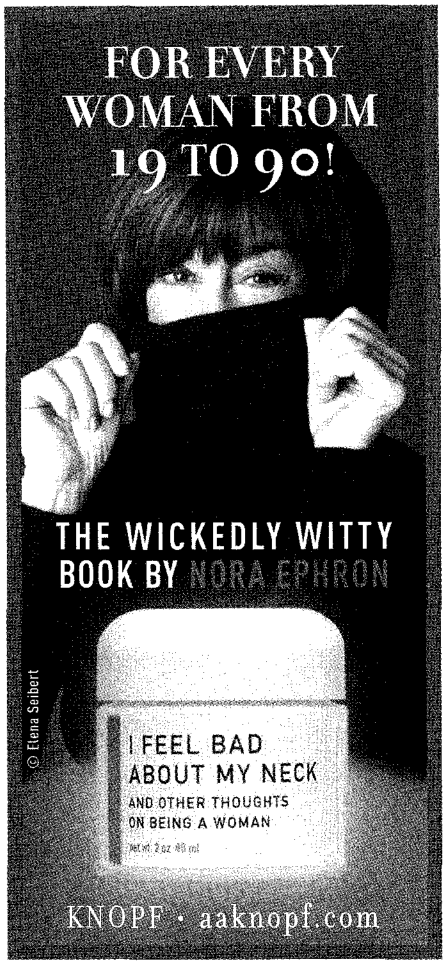
Clea hugged herself with pleasure. I heard her murmur the line, cherishing it privately, ". . . disproportion . . . sodium . . . murder me." The King craned on his Nike toes, checking that the cop was still outside.

"Forget lunch. An hour of your time."

"We're to hover in the post-office lobby for an hour? Doing what, exactly?"

"No, let's go somewhere," Clea said. "A hotel room, if you won't have us in your house."

"Or the bar," I said, offering a check on Clea's presumption. "The bar in the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"If I hire you to find my husband, will you turn some lights on in your office?"

lobby of a hotel, a public setting. For a cocktail."

The King laughed for the first time, a cackle edged, like a burnt cookie, with bitterness. "What largesse. You'd take me to one of our town's fine hotels. They're as superb as the restaurants. Motel 6 or Econo Lodge, I believe those are your options."

"Anywhere," Clea panted.

The King's weary gaze again shunted: Clea, myself, the disinterested postmistress, the Chief outside, who now ground a butt into the curb with his heel and turned his head to follow the progress of some retreating buttocks. The King's voice edged down an octave. "Econo Lodge," he said. "On Lower Brunyon. I'll find you there in fifteen minutes."

"We don't have a vehicle."

"Too bad."

"Can we ride with you?"

"No way, José."

"How do we get there?"

"Figure it out." The King of Sentences departed the P.O. and skulked around the corner and out of view, presumably to his car. I couldn't have entirely imagined the extra little kick in his step as he went. The King had been energized, if only slightly, by meeting his subjects. It was a start, I thought.

On the sidewalk we teetered with excitement, blinking in the glare that now filtered through the gnarled clouds. The Chief looked us up and down again. We offered charming smiles.

"Can I give you folks a lift back to the station?"

"No, thanks, we're looking for Lower Brunyon. Care to point us in the right direction?"

"Why Lower Brunyon?"

"The Econo Lodge, if you must know. Is it walking distance?"

"Longish, I'd say. Why not let me escort you?"

"Sure."

We sat behind a cage. The back seat smelled of smoke, perfume, and vomit, raising interesting questions about the definition of police work in Hastings-on-Hudson. The Chief took corners smoothly, in the prowling, snaky manner of a driver unconcerned about regulating his speed.

"You two in the regular habit of doing junk like this?"

"What do you mean by 'junk'?"

"Putting yourselves in the hands of a customer like your friend in there?"

"I'd be junk in his hands any day," Clea said defiantly.

"Well, he's old and likely pretty harmless by now," the Chief said. "I saw him the other day in the pharmacy, getting himself one of those inflatable doughnuts for sitting on when you've got anal discomfort. I'd say from what I've heard those sort of troubles are his just deserts. We're not dummies around here, you know. When he moved up here from the city a certain number of stories trailed after him. He's been a bad boy."

"He's the greatest maker of sentences in the United States of America," I said.

"I've had a look," the Chief said. "He's not bad. I'm just wondering if you ever troubled with the content of his books, as opposed to just the sentences."

"Sentences *are* content," Clea said.

The Chief lifted his hands in mock surrender. "Fair enough then, I've said my piece. Just understand this—whatever my personal views of either his character or his prose he's under my protection surely as any other citizen in this town. *Comprende?*"

"Does everyone up here speak Spanish? Is this a bilingual metropolis?" Clea said.

"That's enough out of you, young lady. Here's the Econo Lodge, and a good day to you both."

"Thanks, Chief."

We crept inside the Econo Lodge's slumbering atrium. A uniformed teenage clerk blinked hello, raised his hand. We ignored him. The King of Sentences hovered beside a counter bearing urns of complimentary coffee labelled "Premium," "Diesel," and "Jet Fuel." The King nodded mutely, beckoned to us with a tilt of his chin. We trailed him down a corridor with a tongue-hued carpet. I worked not to visualize an anal doughnut.

"Inside," he said.

The King lit only a lamp at the bedside in the windowless room. We crowded in, the room a mere margin to the queen-size bed. The air-conditioner rumbled and hummed. The temperature was frigid. The King took the only chair, gestured us to the bed's edge. We sat.

Clea and I began simultaneously, tangling aloud. "We're—" I said. Clea said, "You're the—"

"Let's not waste time," the King interrupted. He spoke in an exhausted snarl, all redemptive possibility purged from his voice and manner. Our rendezvous had taken on the starkness of an endgame. "Do you want money?"

"Money?" I said.

"That's right." He reached into his shirt pocket and revealed a packet of twenties, obviously prepared in advance. It occurred to me wildly that he'd taken us for blackmailers. Perhaps he was blackmailed routinely, had cash on hand for regular payouts. "How much will it take to make you go away?" He began counting out piles: "Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred, twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, two hundred—"

"We don't want your money!" I nearly shouted. "You've given us enough, you've given us everything! We're here to give something back!"

"I suppose I'm meant to be glad to hear it." He repocketed his money carelessly.

"We'd like you to be glad, yes."

He only cocked an eyebrow. "What have you got for me?"

I untucked my polo shirt and withdrew my chapter, the pages a mass curled and baked in its secret compression against my belly.

"I knew you looked funny!" Clea cried. I ignored her, handed the pages across to the King. He accepted them, his expression sour.

"For a moment there I thought you were about to undress," he said.

"Would you like that?" Clea blurted. "Should we undress?"

The King examined us starkly. He placed my chapter ignominiously on the carpet beneath his chair. Perhaps now we were at the crossroads, perhaps we had his attention at last. "Yes," he said cautiously. "I think that could be . . . advantageous."

We stripped, racing to be the first bared to his view. I'd lose the race either way, for Clea had rigged the game: she had written a sentence on her stomach in blue marker. *The sorcerer lately couldn't recall whether he was a capable sleeper or an insomniac.* Brilliant, I thought bitterly. The King stared. I saw Clea's pubic hair through the eyes of the King. Clea's bush was full and crazy. I thought, I will never see it again without seeing the pubic hair at which the King of Sentences once glanced. The King said, "Insomniac, I believe."

Clea blushed around the sentence, her flesh blazing like neon.

"Hand me your clothes, please."

We handed the King our clothes. He began immediately rending them, in a weary frenzy of destruction, tearing both our shirts sleeve from sleeve, shredding Clea's bra and underwear, slicing at her skirt with his nicotine teeth. He struggled to do any damage to my jeans. I felt I wanted to help him somehow, but stood jellied in my nakedness, doing nothing, not wishing to insult him, to draw attention to his feebleness. It was a mighty enough display, given his age. The hands that had forged the supreme sentences in contemporary American writing were now dismembering the syntax of my underwear.

Soon enough our daily costumes lay in an unseemly ruined pile at our feet. My chapter scattered beneath the clothes and chair legs, forgotten. He hadn't looked at even one sentence, never would. I knew I would have to forgive him. So I did it right then and there: I forgave him.

The King moved to the door. We stood in our bare feet, wobbling slightly, goose-pimpled, still breathing out clouds of expectation like frost-breath.

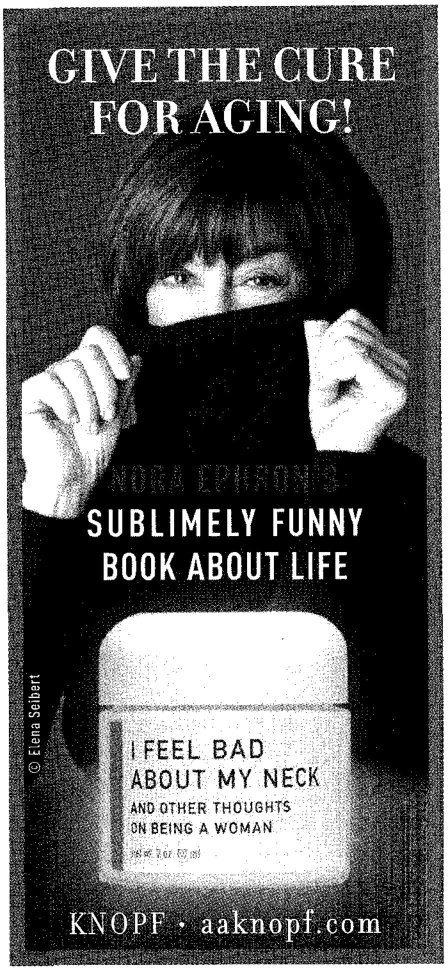
"That's all?" Clea said.

"That's all, you ask? Yes, that's all. That's more than enough."

"You're leaving us here."

"I am."

He closed the door carefully, not slamming it. Clea and I waited an appropriate interval, then turned and clung to each other in a kind of rapture. Understanding, abruptly and at last, just what it takes to be King. How much, in the end, it actually costs. ♦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AND OTHER THOUGHTS ON BEING A WOMAN

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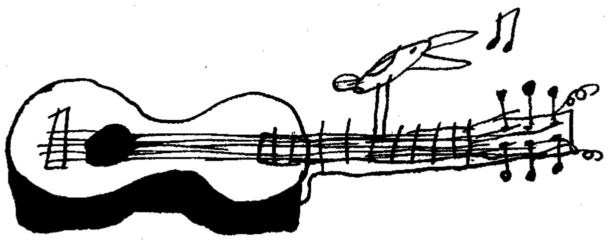


BOOKS

NONE OF THE ABOVE

What I.Q. doesn't tell you about race.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

One Saturday in November of 1984, James Flynn, a social scientist at the University of Otago, in New Zealand, received a large package in the mail. It was from a colleague in Utrecht, and it contained the results of I.Q. tests given to two generations of Dutch eighteen-year-olds. When Flynn looked through the data, he found something puzzling. The Dutch eighteen-year-olds from the nineteen-eighties scored better than those who took the same tests in the nineteen-fifties—and not just slightly better, *much* better.

Curious, Flynn sent out some letters. He collected intelligence-test results from Europe, from North America, from Asia, and from the developing world, until he had data for almost thirty countries. In every case, the story was pretty much the same. I.Q.s around the world appeared to be rising by 0.3 points per year, or three points per decade, for as far back as the tests had been administered. For some reason, human beings seemed to be getting smarter.

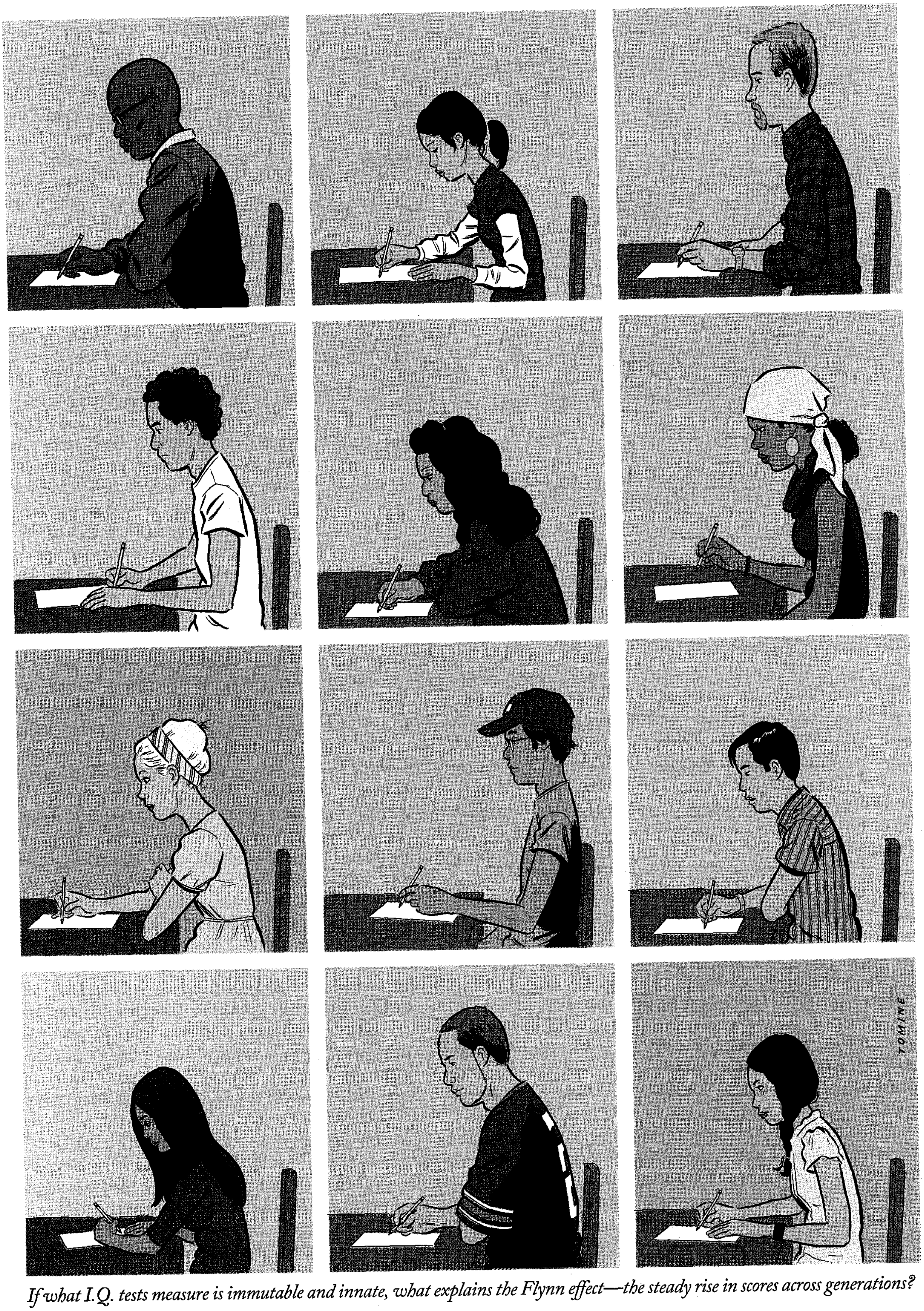
Flynn has been writing about the implications of his findings—now known as the Flynn effect—for almost twenty-five years. His books consist of a series of plainly stated statistical observations, in support of deceptively modest conclusions, and the evidence in support of his original observation is now so overwhelming that the Flynn effect has moved from theory to fact. What remains uncertain is how to make sense of the Flynn effect. If an American born in the nineteen-thirties has an I.Q. of 100, the Flynn effect says that his children will have I.Q.s of 108, and his grandchildren I.Q.s of close to 120—more than a standard deviation higher. If we work in the opposite direction, the typical teen-ager of today, with an I.Q. of 100, would have had grandparents with average I.Q.s of 82—seemingly below the threshold necessary to graduate from high school. And, if we go back even farther, the Flynn effect puts the average I.Q.s of the schoolchildren of 1900 at around 70, which is to suggest, bizarrely, that a century ago the United States was populated largely by people who today would be considered mentally retarded.

For almost as long as there have been I.Q. tests, there have been I.Q. fundamentalists. H. H. Goddard, in the early years of the past century, established the idea that intelligence could be measured along a single, linear scale. One of his particular contributions was to coin the word "moron." "The people who are doing the drudgery are, as a rule, in their proper places," he wrote. Goddard was followed by Lewis Terman, in the nineteen-twenties, who rounded up the California children with the highest I.Q.s, and confidently predicted that they would sit at the top of every profession. In 1969, the psychometrician Arthur Jensen argued that programs like Head Start, which tried to boost the academic performance of minority children, were doomed to failure, because I.Q. was so heavily genetic; and in 1994 Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, in "The Bell Curve," notoriously proposed that Americans with the lowest I.Q.s be sequestered in a "high-tech" version of an Indian reservation, "while the rest of America tries to go about its business." To the I.Q. fundamentalist, two things are beyond dispute: first, that I.Q. tests measure some hard and identifiable trait that predicts the quality of our thinking; and, second, that this trait is stable—that is, it is determined by our genes and largely impervious to environmental influences.

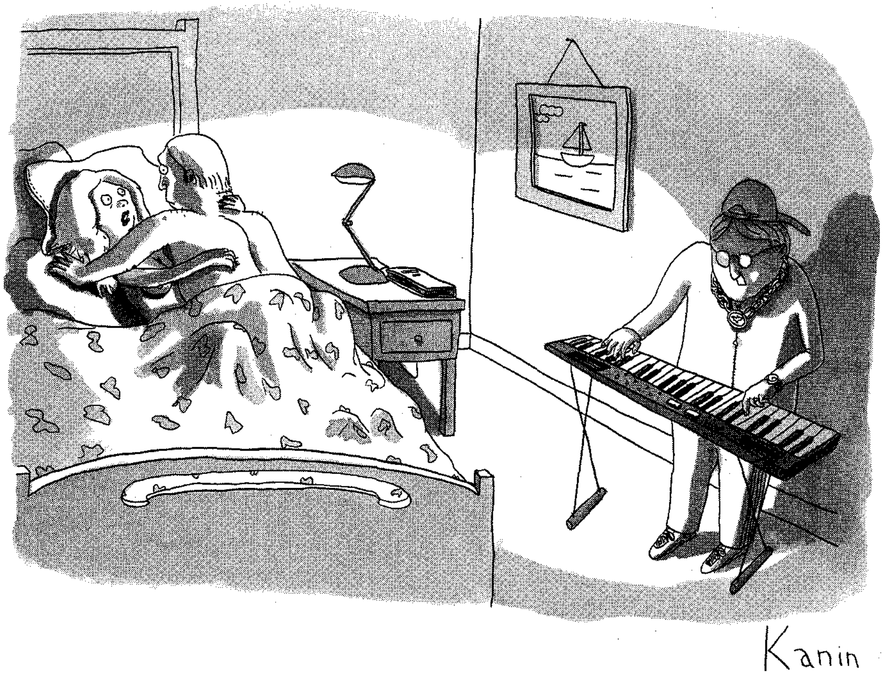
This is what James Watson, the co-discoverer of DNA, meant when he told an English newspaper recently that he was "inherently gloomy" about the prospects for Africa. From the perspective of an I.Q. fundamentalist, the fact that Africans score lower than Europeans on I.Q. tests suggests an ineradicable cognitive disability. In the controversy that followed, Watson was defended by the journalist William Saletan, in a three-part series for the online magazine *Slate*. Drawing heavily on the work of J. Philippe Rushton—a psychologist who specializes in comparing the circumference of what he calls the Negroid brain with the length of the Negroid penis—Saletan took the fundamentalist position to its logical conclusion. To erase the difference between blacks and whites, Saletan wrote, would probably require vigorous interbreeding between the races, or some kind of corrective genetic engineering aimed at upgrading African stock. "Economic and cultural theories have failed to explain most of the pattern," Saletan declared, claiming to have been "soaking [his] head in each side's computations and arguments." One argument that Saletan never soaked his head in, however, was Flynn's, because what Flynn discovered in his mailbox upsets the certainties upon which I.Q. fundamentalism rests. If whatever the thing is that I.Q. tests measure can jump so much in a generation, it can't be all that immutable and it doesn't look all that innate.

The very fact that average I.Q.s shift over time ought to create a "crisis of confidence," Flynn writes in "What Is Intelligence?" (Cambridge; $22), his latest attempt to puzzle through the implications of his discovery. "How could such huge gains be intelligence gains? Either the children of today were far brighter

ADRIAN TOMINE



If what I.Q. tests measure is immutable and innate, what explains the Flynn effect—the steady rise in scores across generations?



"Trust me, Brad, those comedy sound effects aren't a reflection of how this is going."

• •

than their parents or, at least in some circumstances, I.Q. tests were not good measures of intelligence."

The best way to understand why I.Q.s rise, Flynn argues, is to look at one of the most widely used I.Q. tests, the so-called WISC (for Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children). The WISC is composed of ten subtests, each of which measures a different aspect of I.Q. Flynn points out that scores in some of the categories—those measuring general knowledge, say, or vocabulary or the ability to do basic arithmetic—have risen only modestly over time. The big gains on the WISC are largely in the category known as "similarities," where you get questions such as "In what way are 'dogs' and 'rabbits' alike?" Today, we tend to give what, for the purposes of I.Q. tests, is the right answer: dogs and rabbits are both mammals. A nineteenth-century American would have said that "you use dogs to hunt rabbits."

"If the everyday world is your cognitive home, it is not natural to detach abstractions and logic and the hypothetical from their concrete referents," Flynn writes. Our great-grandparents may have been perfectly intelligent. But they would have done poorly on I.Q. tests because they did *not* participate in the twentieth century's great cognitive revolution, in which we learned to sort experience according to a new set of abstract categories. In Flynn's phrase, we have now had to put on "scientific spectacles," which enable us to make sense of the WISC questions about similarities. To say that Dutch I.Q. scores rose substantially between 1952 and 1982 was another way of saying that the Netherlands in 1982 was, in at least certain respects, much more cognitively demanding than the Netherlands in 1952. An I.Q., in other words, measures not so much how smart we are as how *modern* we are.

This is a critical distinction. When the children of Southern Italian immigrants were given I.Q. tests in the early part of the past century, for example, they recorded median scores in the high seventies and low eighties, a full standard deviation below their American and Western European counterparts. Southern Italians did as poorly on I.Q. tests as Hispanics and blacks did. As you can imagine, there was much concerned talk at the time about the genetic inferiority of Italian stock, of the inadvisability of letting so many second-class immigrants into the United States, and of the squalor that seemed endemic to Italian urban neighborhoods. Sound familiar? These days, when talk turns to the supposed genetic differences in the intelligence of certain races, Southern Italians have disappeared from the discussion. "Did their genes begin to mutate somewhere in the 1930s?" the psychologists Seymour Sarason and John Doris ask, in their account of the Italian experience. "Or is it possible that somewhere in the 1920s, if not earlier, the sociocultural history of Italo-Americans took a turn from the blacks and the Spanish Americans which permitted their assimilation into the general undifferentiated mass of Americans?"

The psychologist Michael Cole and some colleagues once gave members of the Kpelle tribe, in Liberia, a version of the WISC similarities test: they took a basket of food, tools, containers, and clothing and asked the tribesmen to sort them into appropriate categories. To the frustration of the researchers, the Kpelle chose functional pairings. They put a potato and a knife together because a knife is used to cut a potato. "A wise man could only do such-and-such," they explained. Finally, the researchers asked, "How would a fool do it?" The tribesmen immediately resorted the items into the "right" categories. It can be argued that taxonomical categories are a developmental improvement—that is, that the Kpelle would be more likely to advance, technologically and scientifically, if they started to see the world that way. But to label them less intelligent than Westerners, on the basis of their performance on that test, is merely to state that they have different cognitive preferences and habits. And if I.Q. varies with habits of mind, which can be adopted or discarded in a generation, what, exactly, is all the fuss about?

When I was growing up, my family would sometimes play Twenty Questions on long car trips. My father was one of those people who insist that the standard categories of animal, vegetable, and mineral be supplemented with a fourth category: "abstract." Abstract could mean something like "whatever it was that was going through my mind when we drove past the water tower fifty miles back." That abstract category sounds absurdly difficult, but it wasn't: it merely required that we ask a slightly different set of questions and grasp a slightly different set of conventions, and, after two or three rounds of practice, guessing the contents of someone's mind fifty miles ago becomes as easy as guessing Winston Churchill. (There is one exception. That was the trip on which my old roommate Tom Connell chose, as an abstraction, "the Unknown Soldier"—which allowed him legitimately and gleefully to answer "I have no idea" to almost every question. There were four of us playing. We gave up after an hour.) Flynn would say that my father was teaching his three sons how to put on scientific spectacles, and that extra practice probably bumped up all of our I.Q.s a few notches. But let's be clear about what this means. There's a world of difference between an I.Q. advantage that's genetic and one that depends on extended car time with Graham Gladwell.

Flynn is a cautious and careful writer. Unlike many others in the I.Q. debates, he resists grand philosophizing. He comes back again and again to the fact that I.Q. scores are generated by paper-and-pencil tests—and making sense of those scores, he tells us, is a messy and complicated business that requires something closer to the skills of an accountant than to those of a philosopher.

For instance, Flynn shows what happens when we recognize that I.Q. is not a freestanding number but a value attached to a specific time and a specific test. When an I.Q. test is created, he reminds us, it is calibrated or "normed" so that the test-takers in the fiftieth percentile—those exactly at the median—are assigned a score of 100. But since I.Q.s are always rising, the only way to keep that hundred-point benchmark is periodically to make the tests more difficult—to "renorm" them. The original WISC was normed in the late nineteen-forties. It was then renormed in the early nineteen-seventies, as the WISC-R; renormed a third time in the late eighties, as the WISC III; and renormed again a few years ago, as the WISC IV—with each version just a little harder than its predecessor. The notion that anyone "has" an I.Q. of a certain number, then, is meaningless unless you know which WISC he took, and when he took it, since there's a substantial difference between getting a 130 on the WISC IV and getting a 130 on the much easier WISC.

This is not a trivial issue. I.Q. tests are used to diagnose people as mentally retarded, with a score of 70 generally taken to be the cutoff. You can imagine how the Flynn effect plays havoc with that system. In the nineteen-seventies and eighties, most states used the WISC-R to make their mental-retardation diagnoses. But since kids—even kids with disabilities—score a little higher every year, the number of children whose scores fell below 70 declined steadily through the end of the eighties. Then, in 1991, the WISC III was introduced, and suddenly the percentage of kids labelled retarded went up. The psychologists Tomoe Kanaya, Matthew Scullin, and Stephen Ceci estimated that, if every state had switched to the WISC III right away, the number of Americans labelled mentally retarded should have doubled.

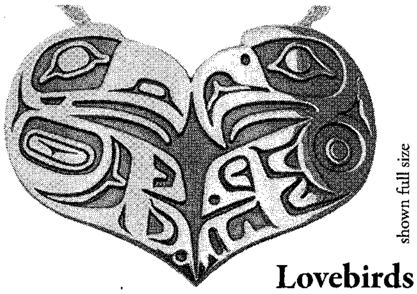
That is an extraordinary number. The diagnosis of mental disability is one of the most stigmatizing of all educational and occupational classifications—and yet, apparently, the chances of being burdened with that label are in no small degree a function of the point, in the life cycle of the WISC, at which a child happens to sit for his evaluation. "As far as I can determine, no clinical or school psychologists using the WISC over the relevant 25 years noticed that its criterion of mental retardation became more lenient over time," Flynn wrote, in a 2000 paper. "Yet no one drew the obvious moral about psychologists in the field: They simply were not making any systematic assessment of the I.Q. criterion for mental retardation."

Flynn brings a similar precision to the question of whether Asians have a genetic advantage in I.Q., a possibility that has led to great excitement among I.Q. fundamentalists in recent years. Data showing that the Japanese had higher I.Q.s than people of European descent, for example, prompted the British psychometrician and eugenicist Richard Lynn to concoct an elaborate evolutionary explanation involving the Himalayas, really cold weather, premodern hunting practices, brain size, and specialized vowel sounds. The fact that the I.Q.s of Chinese-Americans also seemed to be elevated has led I.Q. fundamentalists to posit the existence of an international I.Q. pyramid, with Asians at the top, European whites next, and Hispanics and blacks at the bottom.

Here was a question tailor-made for James Flynn's accounting skills. He looked first at Lynn's data, and realized that the comparison was skewed. Lynn was comparing American I.Q. estimates based on a representative sample of schoolchildren with Japanese estimates based on an upper-income, heavily urban sample. Recalculated, the Japanese average came in not at 106.6 but at 99.2. Then Flynn turned his attention to the Chinese-American estimates. They turned out to be based on a 1975 study in San Francisco's Chinatown using something called the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test. But the Lorge-Thorndike test was normed in the nineteen-fifties. For children in the nineteen-seventies, it would have been a piece of cake. When the Chinese-American scores were reassessed using up-to-date intelligence metrics, Flynn found, they came in at 97 verbal and 100 nonverbal. Chinese-Americans had slightly lower I.Q.s than white Americans.

The Asian-American success story had suddenly been turned on its head. The numbers now suggested, Flynn said, that they had succeeded not because of their *higher* I.Q.s. but despite their *lower* I.Q.s. Asians were overachievers. In a nifty piece of statistical analysis, Flynn then worked out just how great that overachievement was. Among whites, virtually everyone who joins the ranks of the managerial, professional, and technical occupations has an I.Q. of 97 or above. Among Chinese-Americans, that threshold is 90. A Chinese-American with an I.Q. of 90, it would appear, does as much with it as a white American with an I.Q. of 97.

There should be no great mystery about Asian achievement. It has to do with hard work and dedication to higher education, and belonging to a culture that stresses professional success. But Flynn makes one more observation. The children of that first successful wave of Asian-Americans



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really did have I.Q.s that were higher than everyone else's—coming in somewhere around 103. Having worked their way into the upper reaches of the occupational scale, and taken note of how much the professions value abstract thinking, Asian-American parents have evidently made sure that their own children wore scientific spectacles. "Chinese Americans are an ethnic group for whom high achievement preceded high I.Q. rather than the reverse," Flynn concludes, reminding us that in our discussions of the relationship between I.Q. and success we often confuse causes and effects. "It is not easy to view the history of their achievements without emotion," he writes. That is exactly right. To ascribe Asian success to some abstract number is to trivialize it.

Two weeks ago, Flynn came to Manhattan to debate Charles Murray at a forum sponsored by the Manhattan Institute. Their subject was the black-white I.Q. gap in America. During the twenty-five years after the Second World War, that gap closed considerably. The I.Q.s of white Americans rose, as part of the general worldwide Flynn effect, but the I.Q.s of black Americans rose faster. Then, for about a period of twenty-five years, that trend stalled—and the question was why.

Murray showed a series of PowerPoint slides, each representing different statistical formulations of the I.Q. gap. He appeared to be pessimistic that the racial difference would narrow in the future. "By the nineteen-seventies, you had gotten most of the juice out of the environment that you were going to get," he said. That gap, he seemed to think, reflected some inherent difference between the races. "Starting in the nineteen-seventies, to put it very crudely, you had a higher proportion of black kids being born to really dumb mothers," he said. When the debate's moderator, Jane Waldfogel, informed him that the most recent data showed that the race gap had begun to close again, Murray seemed unimpressed, as if the possibility that blacks could ever make further progress was inconceivable.

Flynn took a different approach. The black-white gap, he pointed out, differs dramatically by age. He noted that the tests we have for measuring the cognitive functioning of infants, though admittedly crude, show the races to be almost the same. By age four, the average black I.Q. is 95.4—only four and a half points behind the average white I.Q. Then the real gap emerges: from age four through twenty-four, blacks lose six-tenths of a point a year, until their scores settle at 83.4.

That steady decline, Flynn said, did not resemble the usual pattern of genetic influence. Instead, it was exactly what you would expect, given the disparate cognitive environments that whites and blacks encounter as they grow older. Black children are more likely to be raised in single-parent homes than are white children—and single-parent homes are less cognitively complex than two-parent homes. The average I.Q. of first-grade students in schools that blacks attend is 95, which means that "kids who want to be above average don't have to aim as high." There were possibly adverse differences between black teen-age culture and white teen-age culture, and an enormous number of young black men are in jail—which is hardly the kind of environment in which someone would learn to put on scientific spectacles.

Flynn then talked about what we've learned from studies of adoption and mixed-race children—and that evidence didn't fit a genetic model, either. If I.Q. is innate, it shouldn't make a difference whether it's a mixed-race child's mother or father who is black. But it does: children with a white mother and a black father have an eight-point I.Q. advantage over those with a black mother and a white father. And it shouldn't make much of a difference where a mixed-race child is born. But, again, it does: the children fathered by black American G.I.s in postwar Germany and brought up by their German mothers have the same I.Q.s as the children of white American G.I.s and German mothers. The difference, in that case, was not the fact of the children's blackness, as a fundamentalist would say. It was the fact of their *Germanness*—of their being brought up in a different culture, under different circumstances. "The mind is much more like a muscle than we've ever realized," Flynn said. "It needs to get cognitive exercise. It's not some piece of clay on which you put an indelible mark." The lesson to be drawn from black and white differences was the same as the lesson from the Netherlands years ago: I.Q. measures not just the quality of a person's mind but the quality of the world that person lives in. ♦

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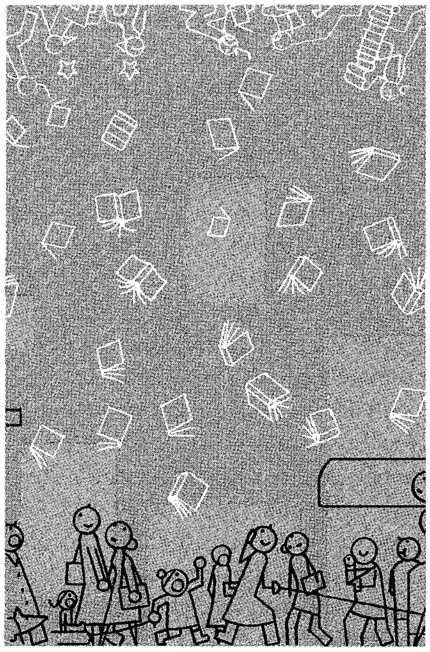

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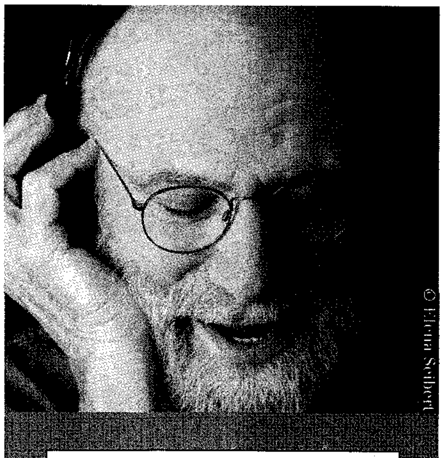

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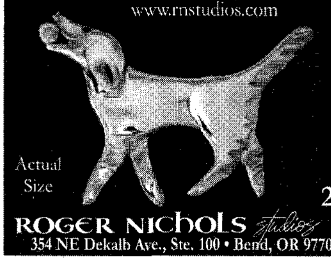
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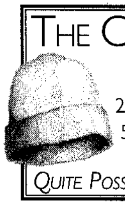
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THE THEATRE

DEVIL MAY CARE

Resurrections in Conor McPherson and Mark Twain.

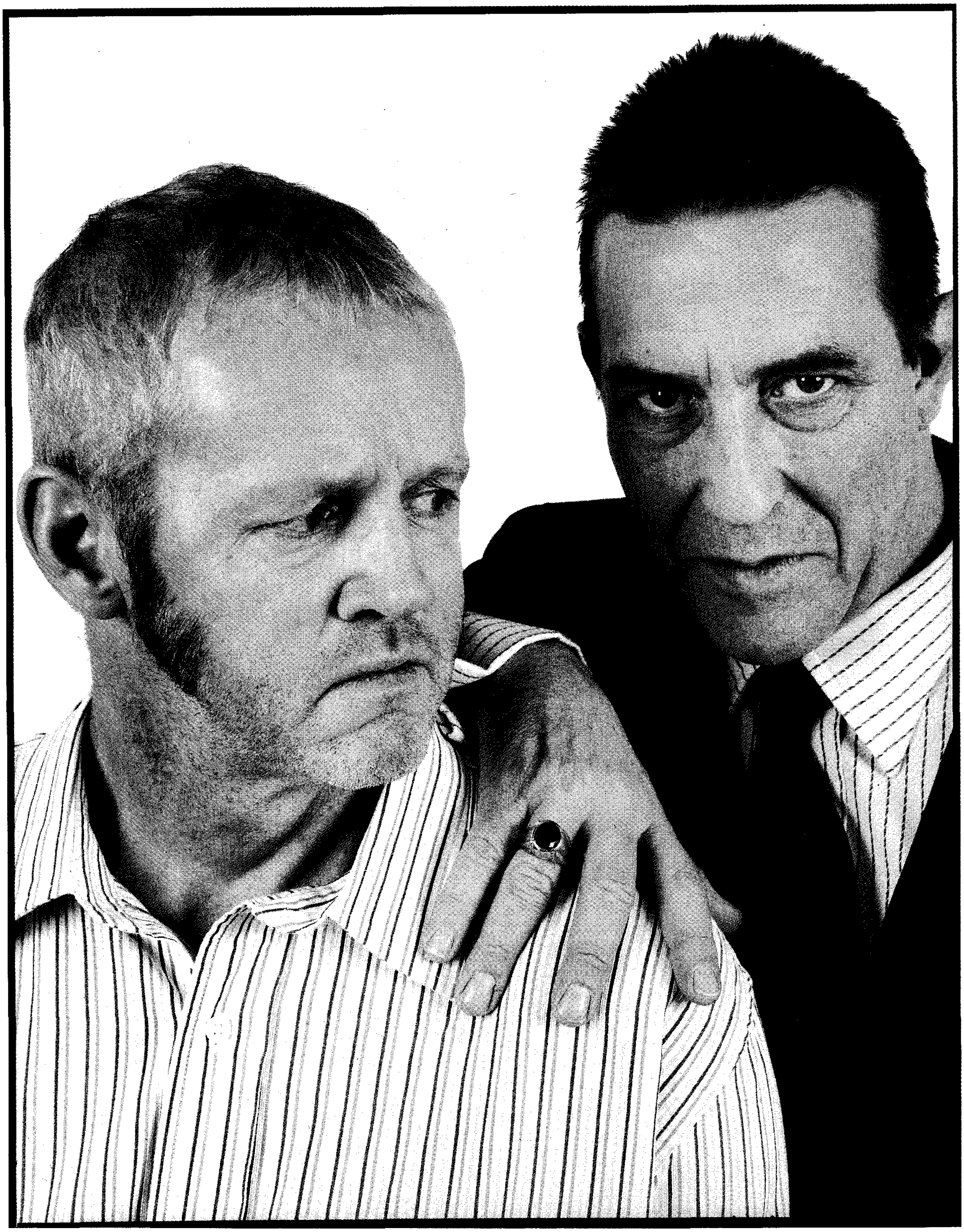
BY JOHN LAHR

"I'm Irish. We think sideways," the professional zany Spike Milligan said. "The Seafarer" (splendidly written and directed by Conor McPherson, at the Booth) is proof of Milligan's point. The play opens in darkness and ends in brightness. It begins on Christmas Eve, as its hero, the strapping and saturnine Sharky Harkin (David Morse), in his upstairs hallway, taps an electric-red votive candle that has gone out, beneath a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the image presides unobtrusively over the play), then descends to his living room to survey the debris of the previous night's heavy drinking. On the surface, this slovenly male household on the outskirts of Dublin is as familiar an Irish export as steel-cut oatmeal: all booze, boorishness, and bravado. But McPherson is up to something altogether more subtle. His title alludes both to the great Anglo-Saxon poem, which provides the play's epigraph, and to Sharky, an "erstwhile fisherman/van driver/chauffeur." The poem is an example of the medieval *peregrinatio*—the story of a journey whose hardships were meant to provide both a spiritual test and a life lesson. Here, in Baldoyle on Christmas Eve, we encounter a bevy of lost souls who are, each in his own way, at sea.

"I'm fucking slipping in and out of time zones here," one whiskey-soaked character says. So, as it happens, are we. McPherson walks a delicate narrative tightrope between secular and eternal time. Rather like a Symbolist painting, within a meticulous rendering of the familiar, McPherson's stage picture manages to suggest the immanence of the miraculous. On Broadway, which is Pagan Central, this is quite an accomplishment. New York rarely sees the kind of stellar, freewheeling playing that makes McPherson's tragicomic spectacle of dereliction come so alive. The Irish lilt gives actors an enormous theatrical advantage; it makes their every utterance seem poetic, comic, and digestible. In this cast's deft performance, vividness trumps metaphysics, and careful observation banishes any whiff of pomposity, religiosity, or symbolic-overloadiosity.

The feckless Sharky has returned to his family home to attend to his older brother, Richard (the wonderful Jim Norton), who has recently gone blind but who nonetheless rules the chaotic roost. As Norton plays him, Richard is a kind of feculent, alcoholic whirlwind, a test for any man's patience. Whether he's on his knees groping for a bottle or refusing to be helped to the toilet or insisting on making his own way down the stairs only to slip, the balky Richard makes Mr. Magoo look like a picture of perfect poise. "Now would you ever give us a Jaysus fucking drink, you're gonna blow the whole Christmas atmosphere," he tells Sharky. "I mean this is all I have! And how many do I have left? Maybe only this one!" Alone or with his feral, round-shouldered sidekick, Ivan (the hilarious Conleth Hill), Richard spends most of his time cadging drinks, pouring drinks, ordering drinks, or reminiscing about drinks. He is literally blind; Ivan—who lost his eyeglasses during the previous night's bender, was locked out of his house for Christmas, and was humiliated by his wife in front of the kids—is as good as blind for most of the play. In fact, by the finale, all the characters are, more or less, blind drunk. "Give us a drop of that holy water, Ivan, till we bless ourselves," Richard says, the sacramental element of alcohol being forgetfulness, not revelation. This blindness extends to the characters' inability to calculate their failures or to admit their sins. Sharky hides the fact that he once beat a man to death; Ivan glosses over his involvement, twenty years earlier, in a fire that killed two families. While McPherson milks every possible drop of comedy from the group's drunken high jinks, the play slyly brings the notion of sight to bear on its real target: the vexing issue of faith, which is, after all, blind as well.

An elegant stranger, Mr. Lockhart



David Morse and Ciarán Hinds face a Faustian showdown in McPherson's "The Seafarer." Photograph by Steve Pyke.

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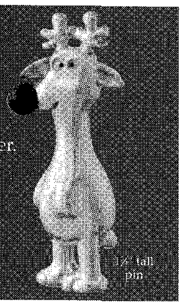

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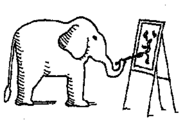

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(Ciarán Hinds), is brought by a friend to join in the house's Christmas festivities: a game of poker. In a trilby and an expensive coat and suit, Lockhart is not just a big spender but the Devil in disguise, come to play for Sharky's soul. "I'm gonna win and you're coming through the old hole in the wall with me tonight," he says. Here, unlike in Woody Allen's "Death Knocks," Hell is no joking matter, and Hinds plays the role with chilling, rueful understatement; his Devil is all gravity and no grace, a sullen, vainglorious bully incapable of pleasure or playfulness. He is anti-life. "You're locked in a space that's smaller than a coffin," he tells Sharky. "You are about to find out that time is bigger and blacker and so much more boundless than you could ever have thought possible with your puny broken mind." When Richard, in a manic moment, claims to see God in a fly—"It's God's revelation," he says—Lockhart fires back, "Well . . . except that they seem to like the taste of shit so much, don't they?"

McPherson is trying to make a case for the mysterious—the little miracles of love and wonder and personal redemption that Lockhart's nihilism won't allow. For commercial as well as for spiritual reasons, it's inevitable that Sharky's soul will be saved. In a very satisfying twist, it is. As Lockhart slopes off, the light under the Sacred Heart blinks on. "Well, that is one maudlin fucker!" Richard says. "Talk about a poor loser!" But the Devil is right about one thing: Sharky has made "a pig's mickey of everything." He has floated through life, unable to find himself either in work or in love. Still, like the Seafarer of the poem, Sharky has wandered, suffered, gone beyond hope of safety, and found his way back to firm ground. He has time to change. With this message, "The Seafarer" breaks through our secular smugness and manages to make the small gestures of connection, charity, and change feel like the true resurrection.

In Mark Twain's recently discovered 1898 farce, "Is He Dead?" (at the Lyceum, under the masterly direction of Michael Blakemore), the painter Jean-François Millet (Norbert Leo Butz) stages his own death and resurrection, in order to raise the value of his masterpieces. Millet comes back to life in drag as his grieving sister, the Widow Tillou. ("It's Madame Tillou to you," says Butz, having a field day.) Twain wrote this romp to celebrate his own emergence from bankruptcy. His burden lifted, he cast his desperation onto Millet, who is held captive, artistically and emotionally, by the fiendish art dealer Bastien André (the superb, serpentine Byron Jennings). André will have either Millet's paintings or his "sister." As the Widow Tillou's bank account grows after Millet's supposed death, so does André's ardor for her. In accordance with the craziness of farce logic, the only way for the Widow Tillou to persuade André to cancel his punitive contract with Millet is by marrying him.

"Writing," Twain said, "was merely billiards to me." David Ives's witty adaptation of "Is He Dead?" gives Twain's jeu a great deal of esprit. Ives understands the seriousness of a light touch; he's swift and smart. He doesn't camp up Millet's camouflage; his laughs—there are a lot of them—are within character. The Widow's efforts to keep her life story straight are terrific fun. Over tea with two prying old biddies, she claims to have had "slathers" of children—a description that amounts, at first, to seven in two years. "Her mind is wandering again," Madame Bathilde (Patricia Conolly) says. "Wandering?" the fluttery Madame Caron (the droll Marylouise Burke) replies. "It's practically abroad!"

At farce speed, all things eventually disintegrate; "Is He Dead?" soon turns into what Eric Bentley called "the theatre of the surrealist body." If the confusion and the collapse here aren't quite sublime, Ives still manages to soup up some side-splitting disembodied images—he has certainly read his Joe Orton. As André watches from behind a screen, believing himself unnoticed, the Widow turns herself into a monster of artifice. Wigs and false teeth, arms, and legs create a howling spectacle whose grotesqueness succeeds in freaking out her would-be inamorata. "This troublesome thing. It's stuck. Help me pop it out," the Widow commands her assistants, who slap her on the back until her left eyeball falls out. "I won't try to wear this one again. Dear André shall have it for a gift," she says. The show ends as it should, with a jig that segues into a curtain call. Caprice has its day; in the sure hands of Blakemore, Ives, and the well-drilled supporting cast, it also has its victory. ♦

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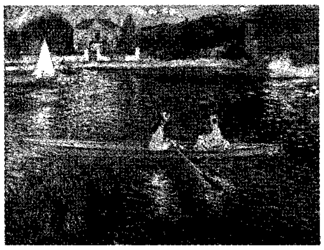

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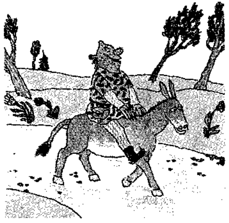

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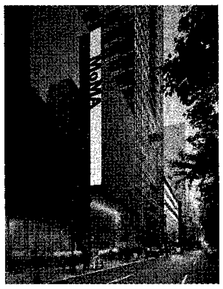

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ON TELEVISION

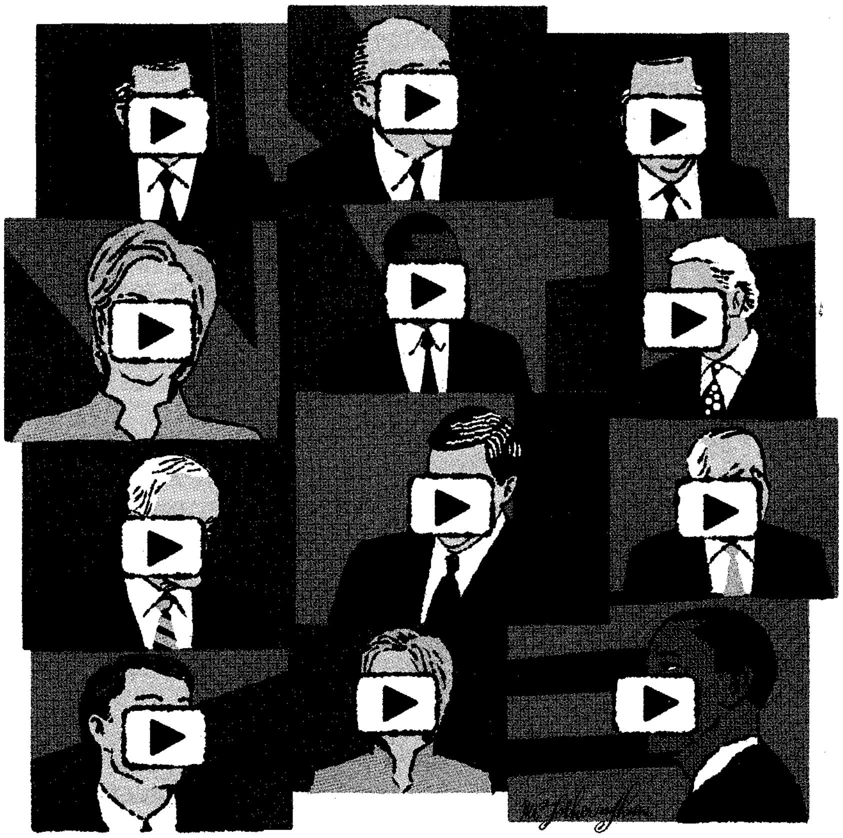
TUBULAR

Presidential hopefuls trade barbs in a new forum.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

In the early moments of the CNN/YouTube Republican debate on November 28th—the follow-up to the CNN/YouTube Democratic debate last July—the often useful phrase "the minutes seemed like hours" suddenly felt inadequate. The phrase lacked an essential active component, some indication that the universe had been violently disrupted and damage had been done. Ever since I watched the musical video that was used to introduce the Presidential candidates, in which a bearded, baseball-cap-wearing fellow named Chris, from the state of Washington, sang a countryish song that provided thumbnail sketches of the men ("Ron Paul would end the F.D.A., and that is just a start. Fred has just begun to run but sure does look the part. Hunter tells us what to do in foreign-policy debates. Huckabee's compassionate and lost a lot of weight. . . ."), I've been wondering, Can a minute last longer than sixty seconds? Can a minute, as it is elapsing, reach larcenously into the future and grab more than its designated sixty ticks, and thereby steal time from your personal allotment? Can time stand still and devour itself at the same time? Yes—in the ninety seconds that it took for Chris to sing his witless rhymes, I became a grandmother, and I don't even have children. I was on the verge of becoming a great-grandmother by the time the song was finally over and Anderson Cooper, the debate's moderator, said, "Enough of the singing, enough of the snowman. Let's begin the debate." The snowman, it should be said—a talking model snowman that appeared in a montage of videos that were rejected from among the more than five thousand submissions—almost prevented the debate from happening. (For the YouTube debates, questions were generated not by the moderator or the live studio audience but by people all over the country who submitted them in short video form.) The iceman first cameth in a video in the Democratic debate, when, speaking in a high voice that called up the old "Mr. Bill" shorts of "Saturday Night Live," he asked a question about global warming. It was humorous—not exactly funny, but humorous—and effective, but Mitt Romney thought the whole thing demeaning and used it as an excuse to bow out of the planned Republican debate; eventually, he came around. This time, the snowman's appearance was, of course, a joke on Romney, and Romney, to show that he could chillax and laugh at himself, made sure to smile—or to force his facial muscles to contract in such a way that viewers would perceive the result as a smile—when the little guy appeared on the screen.

The YouTube debates were a new thing this year, but they aren't revolutionary. Candidates are used to taking questions from "regular people"; what must have been a little odd, though, was watching someone on a huge video monitor (Circuit City, $12,000,000,000.00) ask a question from his living room and then disappear. Where were the candidates supposed to look while responding? At the audience? At the moderator? And many of the videos, as YouTube videos usually are, were of poor quality, with the sound and the image out of synch. CNN would have you think that these were "the people's debates," but, with so many videos to choose from, the network actually had more control over the direction of the event than the usual format affords—though no control, evidently, over whether the questioners dressed for the occasion or straightened up their rooms.



The CNN/YouTube debates add a new dimension to political infotainment.

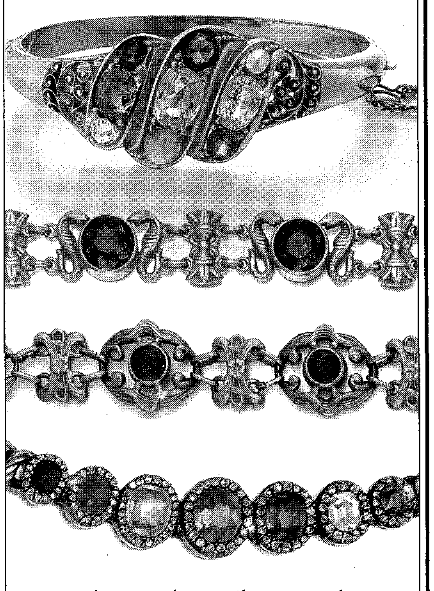
EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

These Q. & A.s—they can't really be called debates—are mostly just a chance for the candidates to reënact their schoolyard days with taunts about their rivals' past policies or statements: "You did this"; "No, I didn't"; "Yes, you did"; "Did not"; "Did so." The best example of this in the November debate came with the very first question, and it was something to see. Ernie from Brooklyn addressed his question to Rudy Giuliani, asking him whether he would "continue to aid and abet the flight of illegal aliens into this country." This led to a back-and-forth in which Giuliani and Romney talked not to but over each other. Giuliani is now richer and better-looking than he was when he was the mayor of New York, his comb-over having been replaced by a more distinguished combed-back look, complete with Paulie Walnuts-style Nike swooshes of white hair on the sides. Romney, for his part, is freakishly, unreally handsome, though handsome is as handsome does, and the exchange didn't exactly bring out any Presidential qualities in the pair. (What it did bring out, the following week, was the truth of Gotcha Giuliani's accusation, when, smiling his mean smile, he said, "You did. You did. You did have illegal immigrants working at your mansion, didn't you?" It came to light that Romney, unknowingly, *still* did. Of course, it would be hard for Romney to know everything that's going on at his house: it's the size of Rhode Island.)

CNN must have been delighted. Anyone who caught this unpleasant, crackling exchange, just minutes into the proceedings, would surely have stayed to watch the entire two-hour spectacle. Nothing else matched this squabble, however—certainly not the candidates' own thirty-second promotional videos, created for the occasion. Tom Tancredo's video featured the risible boast "He took on Geraldo. Now he's ready to take on Hillary." (This is as good a place as any for me to ask, Could we please turn back the clock about twenty years and revert to calling people in public life by their last names? We'd all feel, and possibly act, more grown-up.) Some questions were posed in ways that were far more dramatic than would be acceptable in a live setting. There was a man from California who didn't do much to bring the country's gun lovers and gun-control advocates together when he asked the candidates to state their opinions on the subject. A clear enthusiast ("I'm from a small town, and, as in any small town, we like our big guns"), he held a shotgun, and said, "Don't worry," pulled on the forestock to make a lock-and-load noise, and then finished the sentence: "You can answer however you like." Many people laughed at what they may have taken to be the man's guts and cleverness. It's too bad the debate didn't occur the following week, when the candidates could all have given the appropriate answer to the question with one word: Omaha.

There were no questions about health care (there were in the Democratic event), but not every subject can be covered in two hours, even if there are only three commercial interruptions. It was, as they say, good TV. What fun to see the candidates asked by a man from Texas holding up a Bible if they believed literally every word of it. Giuliani answered first, and Mike Huckabee, in an approximately amusing, snide move, called across the stage to ask him, "Do I need to help you out, Mayor, on this one?" Giuliani, it turned out, needed less help than Romney, who had a more jesuitical response, which didn't precisely answer the very precise question. Huckabee, the minister, managed to avoid answering a question concerning what Jesus would do about the death penalty with the Catskillian rejoinder "Jesus was too smart to ever run for public office," and also ungallantly made the suggestion, in his soft, measured voice, that if the space program were to send a manned flight to Mars "Hillary could be on the first rocket." Mike, you card—you kill me! One priceless exchange occurred between Romney and John McCain, on the subject of torture. Romney, of the hard, piercing voice and evasive, crumbly words, refused to say whether he considered waterboarding to be torture, and as he did so the camera, moving close to McCain's face, captured his temporomandibular muscles pulsing with frustration and anger.

The CNN/YouTube debates were a great promotional device for YouTube, which doesn't mean that they were a gimmick. They got good ratings, and it's safe to assume that they'll be repeated in four years (unless YouTube has been supplanted by some other, unforeseen means of communication). The debates do help you pick up on whether a candidate has a sense of the big picture, is a good listener, tells something like the truth, or is possibly unbalanced. They can help you cull certain candidates, though they may not help you figure out which is the one for you. I'm not sure that the best candidate isn't one who became famous on YouTube long before the debates. He's someone who can hold his own on the screen for almost three minutes, and who behaves consistently, thoughtfully, and with resolve: Gizmo, the toilet-flushing cat. ♦



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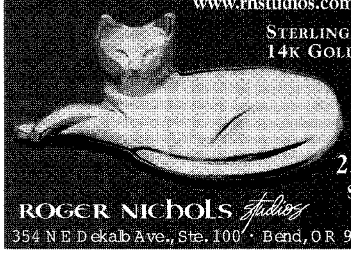

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THE ART WORLD

REFORMERS

The complex world of Lucas Cranach the Elder.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

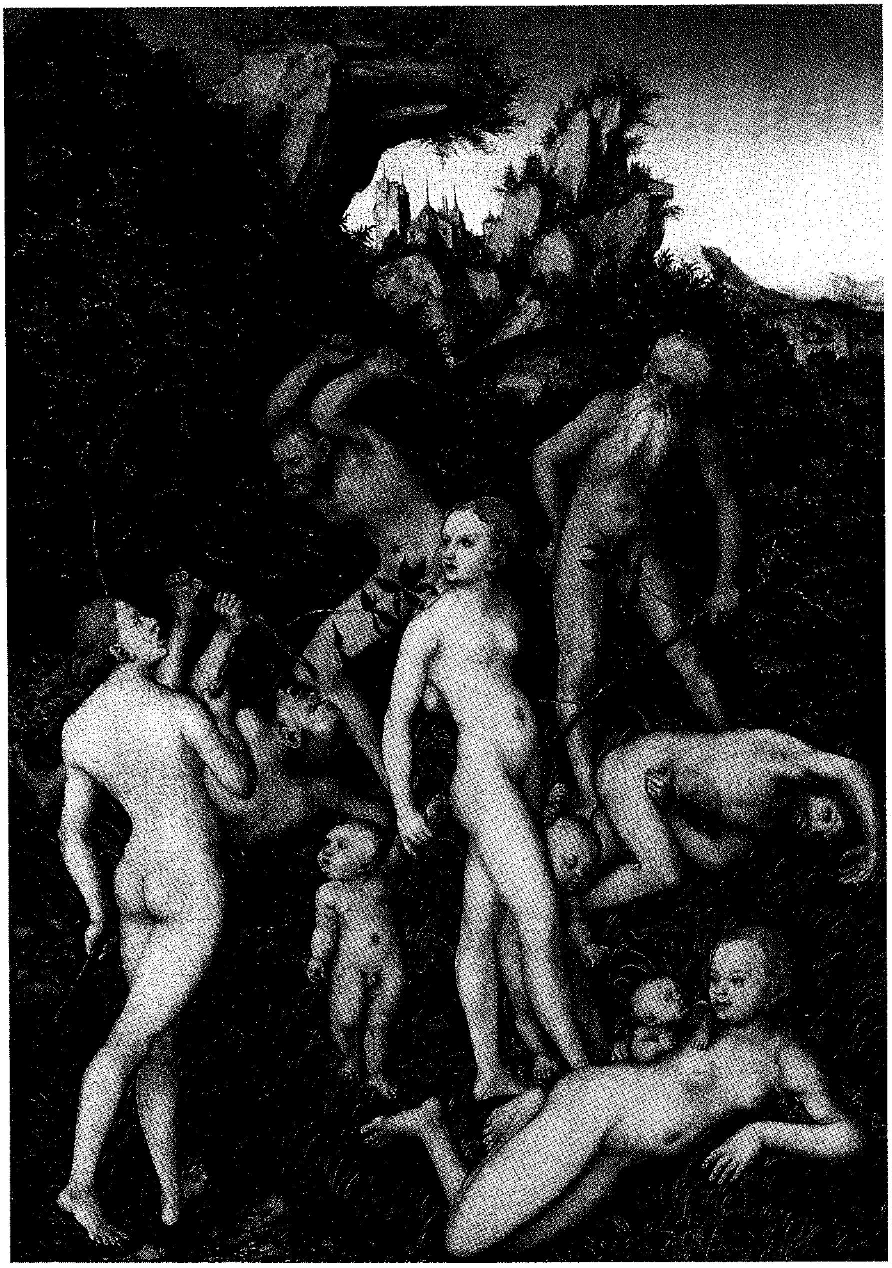
Is it just me, or have the Old Masters got younger lately? If so, it may be because present anxieties about the state and the fate of Western civilization echo past ones, when artists were energized around big issues, such as clashes of modernizing and medievalist mindsets, which may never have been completely settled. Consider a rousing retrospective of the German Renaissance painter Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), which has opened at the Städel Museum, in Frankfurt, and will travel in the spring to the Royal Academy, in London. There are contemporary tangs to this most bewildering paragon of a cohort which included the Leonardoesque Albrecht Dürer and the dazzling Hans Holbein the Younger. Cranach was a sometime religious revolutionary and a full-time entrepreneur. In his work, early strains of late-Gothic blood and guts give way first to courtly high styles, then to pictorial propagandizing for the new theology of his friend Martin Luther—even as, strangely, Cranach continued to oblige Roman Catholic clients. (Those were intricate times.) He rivalled Dürer and Holbein in portraiture, and he developed product lines of delirious erotica and hilarious genre scenes. Buyers seemingly couldn't get enough of his "ill-matched couples": fatuous geezers or crones acuddle with gold-digging babes or young bucks. With a prolific workshop, so well coached that its authorship can be hard to distinguish from his own, and with businesses in real estate, publishing, and a liquor-licensed pharmacy, Cranach became one of the richest men in the Lutheran stronghold of Saxony. He was three times the mayor of Wittenberg. As an artist, he siphoned his era's chaotic energies into wonderments of style. His revisionings of humanity are philosophically resonant and lots of fun.

Cranach was born the son of a painter, in Kronach, in Upper Franconia. Almost nothing else is known of him until around 1500, when, in his late twenties, he showed up in Vienna as a convulsively expressionistic painter of gnarled, gory Crucifixions, often with one of the flanking thieves ingeniously pretzeled on a tree-trunk cross, and with dogs gnawing human remains below. He was an originator of what came to be called the Danube school, a painting movement influenced by humanist intellectuals, which vivified religious motifs with realistic landscape settings and raking light. Eloquent primary colors in Cranach's early work bespeak exposure to Central Italian paintings by Perugino and perhaps by Perugino's likely student the young Raphael. (It's not known whether Cranach visited Italy, but a trip north, in 1508, brought him up to date with Netherlandish innovations.) In 1505, he was hired as the court painter and decorator to the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise. Cranach tamed his drawing, though not his color, in such works as a breathtaking "Beheading of St. Catherine" (1515), in which the thuggish executioner, prior to decapitating the elegant saint, seems tenderly fascinated by the locks of hair he lifts from her neck. She looks scared. Cranach made radiantly personable portraits of court figures and sweet nudes—both Biblical (Eve) and mythological (Venus, Diana, the Three Graces)—featuring girlish, impossibly long-waisted bodies and generic expressions whose repetition somehow doesn't spoil the freshness of each image. The nudes' appeal to prurient gazes is patent in depictions of the noble Roman suicide Lucretia, made cruelly delectable by the pointy dagger poised to enter her pale flesh.

Then along came a certain disaffected Augustinian monk. Cranach was already friends with Luther in 1517, when the Reformer nailed—or perhaps didn't; the tale is disputed—his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, denouncing a public sale of indulgences, by which purchasers could shorten their time in Purgatory, to finance the renovation of St. Peter's in Rome. Cranach and his workshop were soon issuing a stream of movie-star-charismatic Luther portraits, conveying the subject's vigor and humor, absent his explosive temper. The painter introduced Luther to the renegade nun Katharina of Bora, whom he married. The men were godfathers of each other's children. Cranach's enchanting double portraits of the Luthers countered Catholic characterizations of the match as demonic. As the Reformation blazed through German realms, Cranach stoked it with satirical woodcuts that pictured, for example, the Pope and his cronies spilling from a witch's womb. (Less ribald but likewise vicious Catholic broadsides against Luther papered cities to the south.)

Luther seems to have been unfazed by his ally's occasional projects for the enemy camp, which included heroic allegorical paintings of the indulgence-sponsor Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg as St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin. (Luther's German translation was the Reformation's battering ram.) It is less surprising that Cranach continued to paint nudes. Sex was O.K. with Luther—whose related soft spot for babies is reflected in a Cranach painting, from the late fifteen-thirties, of Jesus happily being mobbed by little ones and their mothers. However, as religious dispute descended into religious war, a baleful ideological pressure grew in Cranach's work for churches. In close consultation with Luther, he initiated a practice that, enslaving imagination to didactic programs, is all but oxymoronic: Protestant art.

Protestant mobs destroyed untold amounts of church art in the early years of the Reformation. Luther, returning to Wittenberg in 1522, after a period in hiding, found the city's sanctuaries ravaged by zealots who deemed images of the divine idolatrous. He objected, deciding that, if anyone saw too much in such creations, it was the wreckers themselves. But Luther narrowed his defense of ecclesiastical art to its use for catechismal instruction, chiefly in advancing his doctrine that salvation comes *per solam fidem*—by personal faith alone, without saintly or clerical intercession. No more miracles were to be countenanced, ex-



Cranach's "The Close of the Silver Age" (circa 1530).

COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

cept those warrantied by Scripture. A brilliant book by the art historian Joseph Leo Koerner, "The Reformation of the Image" (2004), expatiates on a work that is not in the Frankfurt show, Cranach's "Wittenberg Altarpiece" (1547), which couches scenes of down-to-earth preaching and religious community in a novel language of discursive signs and gestures. Koerner treats this as a paradigm of recurrent anti-aestheticism in Western art, including that of political correctness. The altarpiece was dedicated on the day of the Battle of Mühlberg, a decisive military defeat of faction-crippled Lutheran forces by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Cranach lost his court position and, in 1550, joined the Elector John Frederick in exile, ending up in Weimar, where he died three years later. After Cranach's death, his workshop was taken over by his son Lucas the Younger—whose works in the show include a startlingly vivacious portrait of Luther's intellectual collaborator Philipp Melanchthon, which, like some Cranach nudes, might almost be the work of our contemporary John Currin. The Cranach family's genealogy is still traced in Germany, where descendants have included Goethe and Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron.

Melanchthon, doubling as an art critic, graded his day's leading painters on their styles, from high to low: Dürer at the top, Matthias Grünewald in the middle, and Cranach the Elder at the bottom. There is indeed an overall rambunctious crudity to Cranach, except in portraits, where he exercised self-forgetfully fine observation. He is careless of composition, often dumping figures into the pictorial rectangle almost at random. But Koerner notes that St. Augustine had "extolled a low style for 'instruction and exegesis'—precisely the jobs that Reformation art was engineered to do." Besides, Cranach's willful romanticism, not Dürer's classical restraint, has been the signature quality of Germanness in art for five centuries since, down to Sigmar Polke, Georg Baselitz, and Anselm Kiefer. (The ever-deliberate Gerhard Richter is an important exception.)

Certain tastes of today dominate climactic sections of the Frankfurt show, which ends in a fiesta of bare flesh and genre comedy. The emphasis makes historical sense in that it points up a career course, of relying on bourgeois markets, that became common for Northern European artists in the following century. These are works whose only reason for being, the odd perfunctory moral notwithstanding, is that people liked them. Pure pleasure is both the subject and the content of "The Golden Age" (1530), a big picture of handsome men and pretty women dancing, lolling, and bathing naked—but for gold necklaces on some of the women—in a walled garden, among peaceable deer, lions, rabbits, fox, and birds, with castles and mountains in the blue distance. A ring of dancers anticipates Henri Matisse's "La Danse" in their abandoned mood as well as their gaily lurching form. The sidelong gaze of a female dancer invites us to join in. A woman about to splash water on a playfully cringing man is laugh-out-loud cute. Schematic renderings of grass and foliage, in two or three overlapped greens, typify the artist's indifference to Renaissance realism; but you can just about feel and smell the moist verdure. Cranach had a penchant for joy, undimmed in an age that turned the world upside down. What were the secrets of his fortitude? These days, it would be salutary to know. ♦

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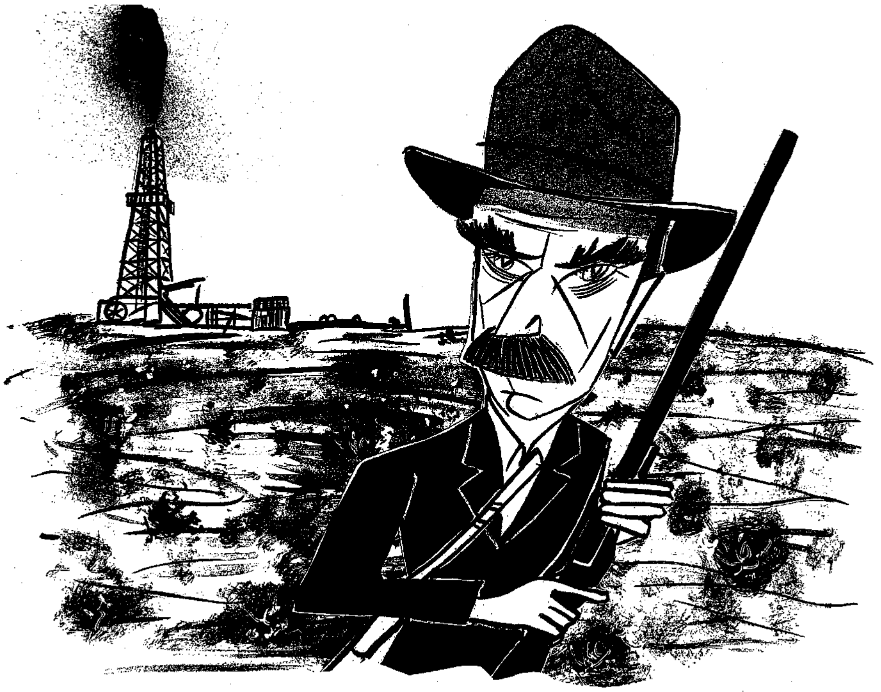
THE CURRENT CINEMA

HARD LIFE

"There Will Be Blood," "Juno," "The Kite Runner."

BY DAVID DENBY

Early in "There Will Be Blood," an enthralling and powerfully eccentric American epic (opening on December 26th), Daniel Plainview climbs down a ladder at his small silver mine. A rung breaks, and Daniel (Daniel Day-Lewis) falls to the base of the shaft and smashes his leg. He's filthy, miserable, gasping for breath and life. The year is 1898. Two and a half hours later (and more than thirty years later in the time span of the film), he's on the floor again, this time sitting on a polished bowling lane in the basement of an enormous mansion that he has built on the Pacific Coast. Having abandoned silver mining for oil, Daniel has become one of the wealthiest tycoons in Southern California. Yet he's still filthy, with dirty hands and a face that glistens from too much oil raining down on him—it looks as if oil were seeping from his pores. The experience chronicled between these two moments is as astounding in its emotional force and as haunting and mysterious as anything seen in American movies in recent years. I'm not quite sure how it happened, but after making "Magnolia" (1999) and "Punch-Drunk Love" (2002)—skillful but whimsical movies, with many whims that went nowhere—the young writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson has now done work that bears comparison to the greatest achievements of Griffith and Ford. The movie is a loose adaptation of Upton Sinclair's 1927 novel "Oil!," but Anderson has taken Sinclair's bluff, genial oilman and turned him into a demonic character who bears more than a passing resemblance to Melville's Ahab. Stumping around on that bad leg, which was never properly set, Daniel Plainview—obsessed, brilliant, both warmhearted and vicious—has Ahab's egotism and command. As for Daniel Day-Lewis, his performance makes one think of Laurence Olivier at his most physically and spiritually audacious.



Daniel Day-Lewis in Paul Thomas Anderson's adaptation of Upton Sinclair's "Oil!"

TOM BACHTELL

At the start, Daniel and a small group of workers, wildcatting for oil, give themselves entirely to their perilous labor. There isn't a word of dialogue. Again and again, Anderson creates raptly muscular passages—men lifting, hauling, pounding, dragging, working silently in the muck and viscous slime. Yet this film is hardly the kind of glory-of-industry documentary that bored us in school. "There Will Be Blood" is about the driving force of capitalism as it both creates and destroys the future, and the film's tone is at once elated and sickened. A dissonant, ominous electronic wail, written by the Radiohead guitarist and composer Jonny Greenwood, warns us of trouble ahead. Once the derricks are up, Greenwood imitates the rhythmic thud of the drill bits and pumps with bustling passages of plucked strings and pounding sticks. "Blood" has the pulse of the future in its rhythms. Like the most elegiac Western, this movie is about the vanishing American frontier. The thrown-together buildings look scraggly and unkempt, the homesteaders are modest, stubborn, and reticent, but, in their undreamed-of future, Wal-Mart is on the way. Anderson, working with the cinematographer Robert Elswit, has become a master of the long tracking shot across still, empty landscapes. The movie, which cost a relatively cheap twenty-five million dollars to make, has gravity and weight without pomp; it's austerely magnificent, and, when violence comes—an exploding oil well, a fight—it's staged cleanly, in open space, and not as a tumult of digital effects or a tempest in an editing room.

One of the workers holds and kisses a baby, then dies in an accident, and Daniel raises the child, whom he calls H.W. (Dillon Freasier), as his son and partner. The movie skips to 1911, when Daniel and H.W. are travelling around California in a tin lizzie, buying up land leases, at bargain rates, from ranchers and farmers who are sitting on underground oceans of gold. Daniel takes advantage of their ignorance to pay them less than they deserve, and, as he addresses a group of them, Day-Lewis's performance comes into focus. He lowers his chin slightly, and his dark eyes dance with merriment as he speaks in coarse yet rounded tones, the syllables precisely articulated but with a lengthening of the vowels and final consonants that gives the talk a singing, almost caressing quality. It is the voice of dominating com-

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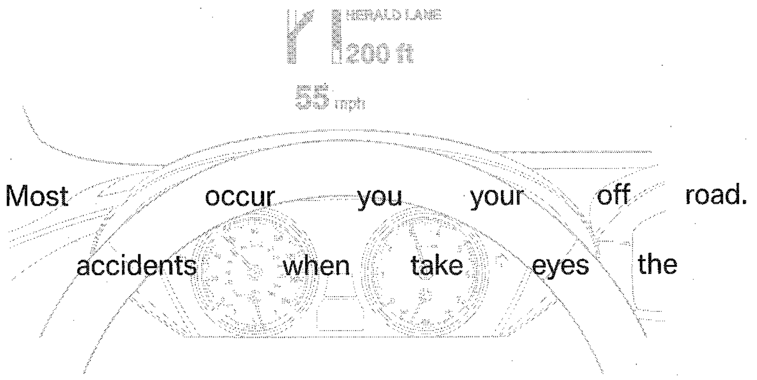

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THIS WEEK

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Ryan Lizza and Dorothy Wickenden
discuss the Presidential debates

The art of Lucas Cranach the Elder

Et Als, a new blog by Hilton Als

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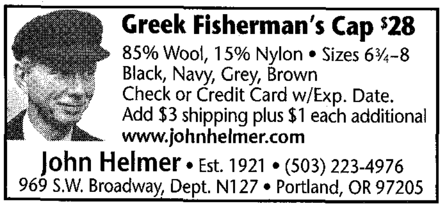
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mercial logic—an American force of nature. Day-Lewis, at fifty, is lean and fit, and his scythe-like body cuts into the air as he works or stalks, head thrust out, across a field. Much of the time, he projects a wonderful gaiety, but his Daniel never strays from business. He ignores questions, reveals nothing, and masters every encounter with either charm or a threat. He has no wife, no friends, and no interests except for oil, his son, and booze. He drinks heavily, which exacerbates his natural distrust and competitiveness. Even when he's swimming in the Pacific, he looks dangerous. In his later years, however, Daniel disintegrates, and the iconic associations shift from Ahab to Charles Foster Kane.

Upton Sinclair was a longtime socialist, yet he understood that nothing in American life was more exhilarating than entrepreneurial energy and ruthlessness. The movie retains the novel's exuberance, but turns much darker in tone. H.W. becomes a victim of the oil rush, and Anderson drops Sinclair's moral hero, a Communist who organizes the oil workers. Sinclair was a reformer who wanted to ameliorate the harsh effects of capitalism, but Anderson apparently reasoned that social radicalism did not—and could not—stop men like Daniel Plainview. Sinclair, the garrulous, fact-bound literalist, has been superseded by a film poet with a pessimistic, even apocalyptic, streak.

But Anderson does retain Sinclair's portrait of an unctuous young man who thinks he has the word of God within him: Eli Sunday (Paul Dano), who creates, in the oil fields, the revivalist Church of the Third Revelation. Dano, who was the silent, philosophy-reading boy in "Little Miss Sunshine," has a tiny mouth and dead eyes. He looks like a mushroom on a long stem, and he talks with a humble piety that gives way, in church, to a strangled cry of ecstatic fervor. He's repulsive yet electrifying. Anderson has set up a kind of allegory of American development in which two overwhelming forces—entrepreneurial capitalism and evangelism—both operate on the border of fraudulence; together, they will build Southern California, though the two men representing them are so belligerent that they fall into combat. The movie becomes an increasingly violent (and comical) struggle in which each man humiliates the other, leading to the murderous final scene, which gushes as far over the top as one of Daniel's wells. The scene is a mistake, but I think I know why it happened. Anderson started out as an independent filmmaker, with "Hard Eight" (1996) and "Boogie Nights" (1997). In "Blood," he has taken on central American themes and established a style of prodigious grandeur. Yet some part of him must have rebelled against canonization. The last scene is a blast of defiance—or perhaps of despair. But, like almost everything else in the movie, it's astonishing.

Working with the director Jason Reitman ("Thank You for Smoking"), the terrific comedy writer Diablo Cody has fashioned a lovely little movie, "Juno," told entirely from the point of view of a teen-age girl. Juno (Ellen Page), who lives in a suburb of Minneapolis, finds herself in a terrible fix—she's pregnant at sixteen—and her reaction to her overwhelming new situation is to treat it with the same flip, pop-cult, high-school sarcasm with which she addresses everything else. She goes to the local abortion clinic but finds the place disgustingly casual (they hand out flavored condoms), and she decides to carry the baby to term. Up to this point, all that Juno does, including having sex in a chair with her friend Bleek (Michael Cera), is based on nervy impulse, and Ellen Page, a young Canadian actress, speaks rapidly and irritably, nailing Juno's lines with easy precision. Looking for adoptive parents, Juno quickly finds what seems to be an ideal couple: the wealthy Lorings, who live in a beige-walled McMansion with furnishings out of an upscale home-decorating magazine. Mark (Jason Bateman), a fortyish composer of commercial jingles, connects with Juno's taste in rock music and slasher movies, and his wife, the beautiful Vanessa (Jennifer Garner), badly wants to be a mom. "If I could just have the thing, and give it to you now, I totally would," Juno tells them. She's a shrewd girl, and very blunt, yet she's taken in by her own gift for rude comedy, which, as we learn, masks a great deal of uncertainty. When she and Bleek fight, and the Lorings' marriage begins to fall apart, her cool collapses into bewilderment and tears. Where are love and constancy to be found? Reitman stages Juno's crisis with great tenderness, and enfolds it in a witty and playful formal frame: the narrative progresses through the seasons, starting in autumn, with the first three corresponding to Juno's trimesters. The seasons are also punctuated by Kimya Dawson's plaintively funny songs, and by passing groups of runners from Juno's high school, including Bleek, whose golden shorts reveal his slender long legs—his best feature, according to Juno. Michael Cera enters a scene like a soft breeze. Tall and mop-haired, he's so mild it takes us a while to realize how intelligent Bleek is, and how entirely he appreciates Juno's humor. This couple is younger than the battling Seth Rogen and Katherine Heigl in last summer's unwanted-pregnancy comedy, "Knocked Up." They're not ready for roughhouse in bed or anywhere else. When they argue, they can't conceal their dismay even as they are winging insults at each other. "Juno" is a coming-of-age movie made with idiosyncratic charm and not a single false note.

Shame is the driving emotion in "The Kite Runner," Marc Forster's sturdy movie based on Khaled Hosseini's international best-seller. As a child in Kabul, in the late nineteen-seventies, Amir, whose family was wealthy, grew up side by side with Hassan, the son of his father's servant. Hassan was a devoted, even adoring, friend, but Amir, a physical coward, did not protect him against brutal violation in a Kabul alley. Having emigrated to Northern California, Amir (Khalid Abdalla) carries this and subsequent betrayals of Hassan inside his soul, but, in 2000, he's given a chance at redemption—a possible rescue operation that requires him to go back to Afghanistan, now dominated by the Taliban. Shame is rarely an active emotion, and that may account, in part, for the movie's slight stiffness and hesitancy; the dangers of staging a rape scene with children may have been inhibiting as well. One wants the actors to cut loose, but young Khalid Abdalla is forced to stand around looking stricken most of the time, and the director, a Swiss-German, worked with some of the actors through translators, which slowed the tempo and killed colloquial ease—the dialogue is well written, but there's dead air around the lines. The best things in "The Kite Runner" are the portrait of Kabul's flourishing upper-class life before the Soviets and then the Taliban took over, and the depiction of the bleak hypocrisies of the Taliban period—the disgusting cruelties performed in the name of righteousness, and the madness that makes it an offense to look at a woman's face but acceptable to keep a young boy as a sex slave. The movie's heart is certainly in the right place—it's a quietly outraged work—but I wish there were more excitement in it from moment to moment. ♦

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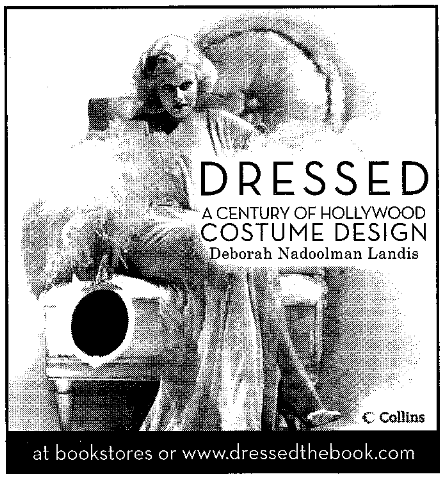
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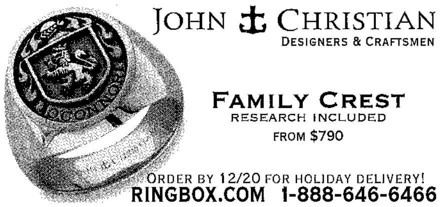
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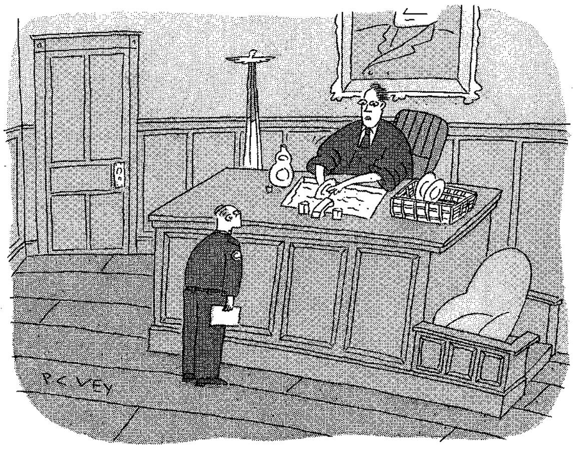
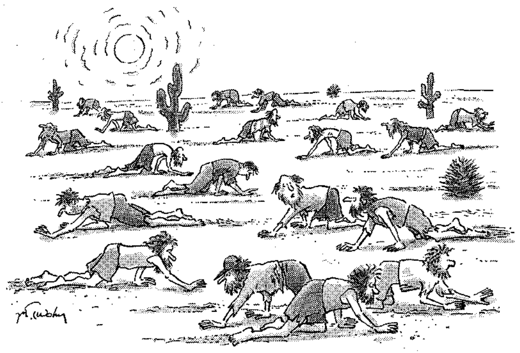


"If the jury needs another day, they're using paper plates tomorrow."
Emily Anhalt, Guilford, Conn.



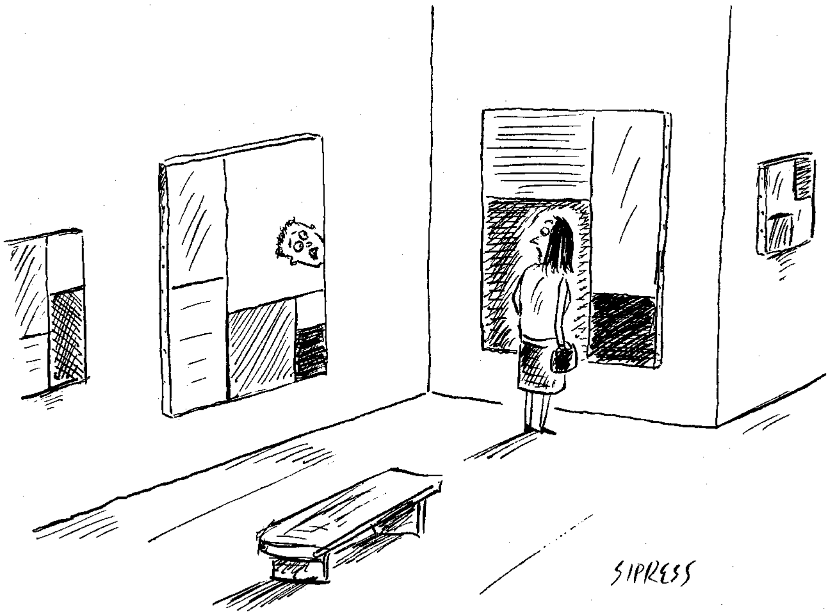
THE FINALISTS

"What disease are you crawling for?"
Barney Goltz, Bellingham, Wash.

"If we had just started wandering fifteen minutes earlier, we would have missed most of this traffic."
Dan Malmborg, Bennington, Vt.

"I don't know about you, but I'd be willing to pitch in for a new contact lens."
Peter Moller, Syracuse, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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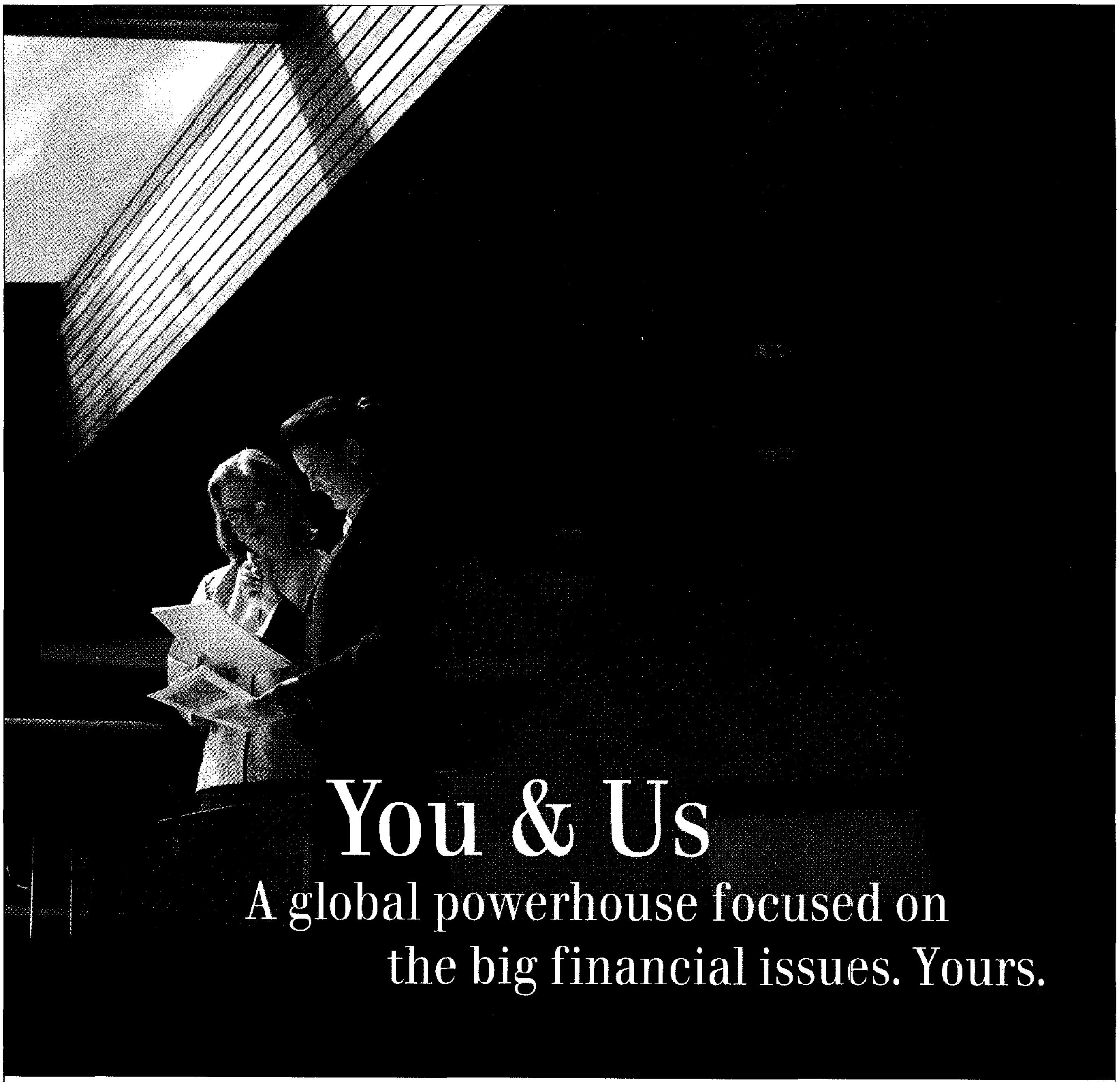

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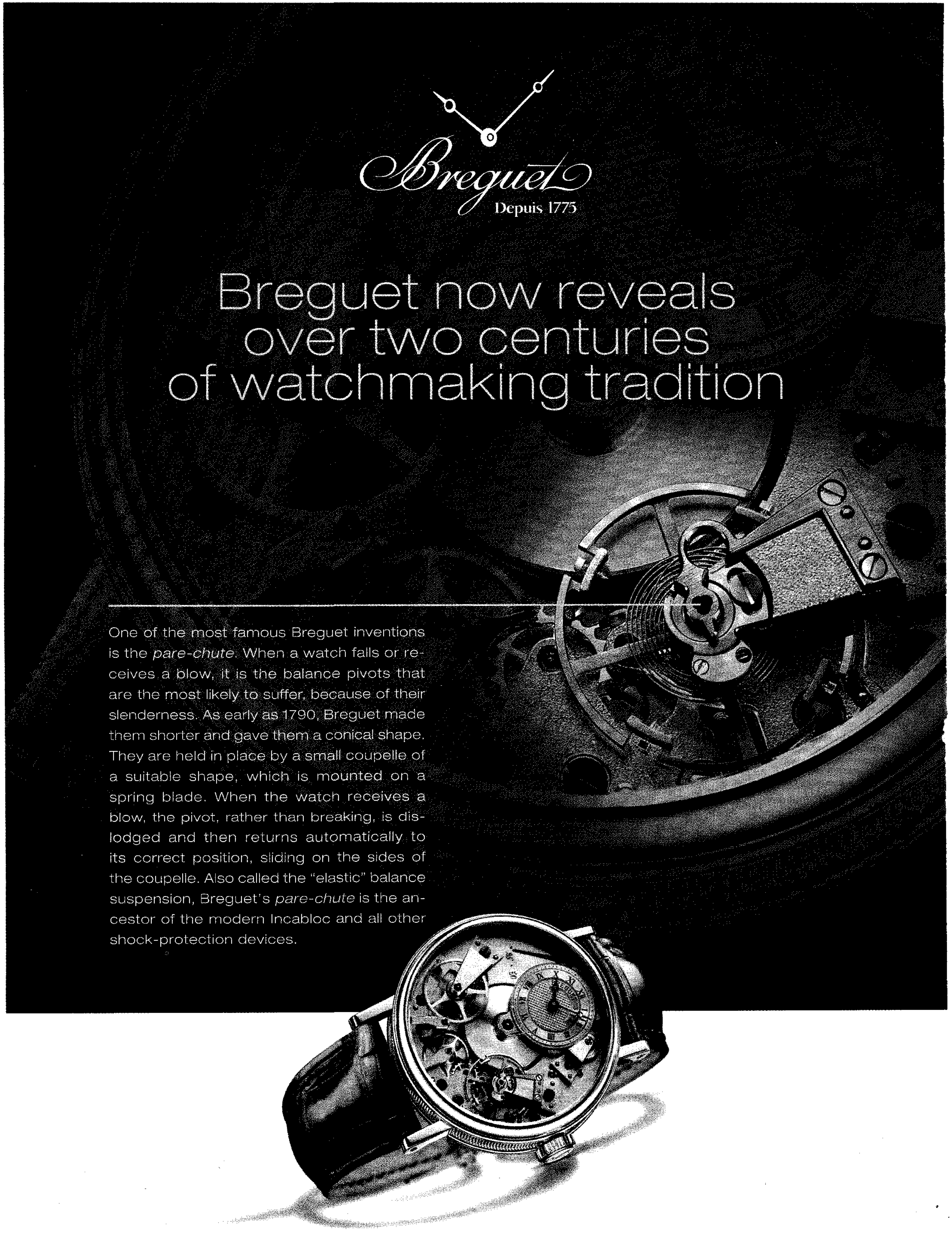

Breguet
Depuis 1775

Breguet now reveals over two centuries of watchmaking tradition

One of the most famous Breguet inventions is the *pare-chute*. When a watch falls or receives a blow, it is the balance pivots that are the most likely to suffer, because of their slenderness. As early as 1790, Breguet made them shorter and gave them a conical shape. They are held in place by a small coupelle of a suitable shape, which is mounted on a spring blade. When the watch receives a blow, the pivot, rather than breaking, is dislodged and then returns automatically to its correct position, sliding on the sides of the coupelle. Also called the "elastic" balance suspension, Breguet's *pare-chute* is the ancestor of the modern Incabloc and all other shock-protection devices.

Inspired by a souscription watch, "La Tradition Breguet" salutes one of Breguet's most important inventions, the *pare-chute*. Hand-wound mechanical movement, caliber 507DR, with straight-line lever escapement, monometallic balance and Breguet overcoil.

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